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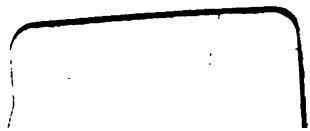
The Moving Finger Writes

Litchfield



By Grace Denio Litchfield

ONLY AN INCIDENT.

THE KNIGHT OF THE BLACK FOREST.

CRISS-CROSS.

A HARD-WON VICTORY.

LITTLE VENICE, AND OTHER STORIES.

IN THE CRUCIBLE.

THE MOVING FINGER WRITES.

MIMOSA LEAVES.

F

THE MOVING FINGER WRITES

BY

GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD

Author of "In the Crucible," "A Hard-Won Victory" "Little Venice," etc.

Character is a man's destiny.
Heraclitus

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.
Omar Khayyám

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NEW YORK AND LONDON
1900

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THE MOVING FINGER WRITES

THE MOVING FINGER WRITES

CHAPTER I

A SPACE OF FLOWERS

Four grey walls and four grey towers
Overlook a space of flowers.

— TENNYSON.

AGNES ALDEN had grown up in the surroundings that make most for blessedness. Living on the outskirts of a great town, she was within easy reach of all that lies in a city's gift of best, yet dwelt aloof in that atmosphere of spaciousness, freedom, and peace that most conduces to the soul's development.

Her home was on the summit of a gently sloping hill, at whose base a mile away the city spread broadly out on either hand. Beyond were the blue waters of an ample bay, bearing a world's commerce on its shining bosom, and beyond again, half way across the horizon, a low range of hills made a blurred line of deeper blue against the turquoise of the sky. The grey stone towers of the Alden mansion caught the last gleam of the sinking sun, as

they caught also the earliest beam of the young moon rising tremulously out of a black sea of forest. Night after night, as Agnes lingered in her turret windows, the beauty of the picture before her—the woods running darkly down to the city, the city spreading superbly out to the sea, and the heavens stretching over all in one magnificent sweep—filled her anew with as fresh delight as though she had not made acquaintance with it a score of years before.

Very placid, healthful years those had been, rounding the girl's slender height into exquisite symmetry, and writing their peaceful record on a low broad forehead of great beauty and lovableness. Her brows, finely drawn and of a shade darker than her hair, and her straight nose with its sensitive nostrils, added a delicate strength to her face further emphasized by the steadfastness of her eyes. These were wide and earnest, starred with dark lashes and splendid with a colour of their own that was neither hazel nor tawny nor brown yet looked all three, and that curiously matched the billowy masses of her hair, which was so warm and silky and with such a glory of light through it that beside it gold looked dull. The lower part of her face was less perfectly modelled, and there were vague lines of unrest and impatience about the mouth, whose full, expressive lips made almost too vivid a scarlet against the creamy colourlessness of her skin. But her teeth were beautiful, and the rare smile that disclosed them was so winningly sweet that having met it once it was impossible not to desire and watch for it again. Thus far she had grown up as a flower grows, the

result of beneficent chances and influences, and was what she was without conscious effort. It remained to be proved whether her life was to unfold into richer and higher purposes, fruit following flower as flower follows seed, or having already reached its culminating point was to wither into uselessness. Time holds many answers in reserve, and this one, too, was in his keeping.

Old Oaks, the domain of the Alden family, was less ancient than its grand old trees, whose venerableness was matter of historic fact. The house stood a little to one side in a park whose perfection of finish contrasted incongruously with the surrounding country, which was a waste of tangled forests where owls hooted and of meadows where cattle stood knee deep in grass. Within this park every group of trees, every shrub, every flower-bed, every stone even, had its studied and harmonious significance. But the chief charm lay in the sweep of the land itself. From the stone terraces at the front and sides of the mansion the smooth-shaven lawns fell away in gracious slopes that rounded into each other in melting curves and soft declines, here running together into a daisied mound for a sylvan seat, there breaking into a foam of flowers against an unexpected rock, and here again dividing to give right of way to a path so tantalizingly alluring that no human foot could choose but follow it.

The house had been built early in the century by Hamilton Alden, who, attracted to the isolated spot by the beauty of its outlook, had fashioned him a dwelling like a castle, all domes and turrets and

colonnaded porticoes, with windows opening to the floor or leading out upon Juliet balconies, and with broad balustraded roof-tops that made piazzas at every story. The interior had an atmosphere quite its own, beginning with the great domed entrance-hall, two stories high, from which radiated all the rooms upstairs and down, and which conveyed an impression of gracious hospitality repeated by the reception-room with its comfortable warm-hued furnishings, whose every chair appeared to entreat the visitor to be at ease. Beyond this was a white and gold state drawing-room, glittering with mirrors and stiff with cumbersome brocaded sofas, and so shut off from the outside by conservatories as to be dim and cool even in the hottest midday. Then there were numerous little anterooms and window-bays and irregular nooks, each with its particular attraction of lounging-seat and statue or picture. For Hamilton Alden had been a man of keen artistic tastes, which for years he had devoted to the embellishment of his home, selecting each art treasure with so special a reference to its destined place that it seemed as intrinsic a part of the building as the soul is one with the body it inhabits. The varied height of the ceilings on the main floor gave picturesqueness, stateliness, or cosiness to each apartment in turn, and occasioned delightful eccentricities of treatment on the floor above, where few rooms were on the same level, while below, in the basement, there were mysterious stone cellars and vaults, and a long precipitous underground passageway leading to an abandoned well, all gloomy and

weird enough to have been the trysting-place of ghosts. Altogether it was a house of unique individuality, and gifted, as some persons are, with the power of preserving its distinctiveness intact through any outward changes brought by time.

Jefferson Alden, Hamilton Alden's sole heir, was a very different man from his father. His inherited fortune left him free to arrange his life as he would, and a constitutional delicacy, hinted at by the angularity of his tall thin frame and habitual pallor, afforded him the desired excuse for following his natural bent toward seclusion and study. He valued his wealth only so far as it emancipated him from taking any thought for it. Art he scorned, the thing represented lacking truth, to his mind, because of its essential lack of life. And society in its wide sense he abhorred, his spectacled grey eyes showing always the faintly satirical though kindly twinkle of an expostulatory onlooker at the world's doings. For his friends, however, when made precisely to his pattern, he cared greatly, and to those few he disclosed the richness of a rarely well-stored mind and the charm of a placid, refined, and gently humorous nature.

He had altered nothing about the estate or its management since he had come into its possession, only adding some rare old books, a young wife, and her widowed sister. The books, more invaluable than ever, were with him still. So was the sister-in-law, with the whimsical, affectionate antagonism to himself that gave spice to their relationship, and with her semi-invalidism that time neither aggra-

vated nor diminished and that accorded so conveniently with his chosen way of living. Only the young wife was gone. Yet it seemed of late as if she were there again in the daughter whom twenty summers before she had left him in her place. Upon that daughter had been lavished unstintedly all the love and tenderness that were in him. Agnes knew nothing of schools or governesses or hard-and-fast routine rules of study. Her father taught her himself, and in such wise that knowledge came to her as the unfolding of leaves comes to the budded trees when April and sunshine are upon them. His curriculum was tolerably comprehensive, but consisted solely of his personal preferences. Thus he taught the child entrancing bits of botany and geology in their rambles through the woods, and mathematics enough to follow him in taking an observation of the sun or in calculating the height of the giant oaks upon the lawn, and architecture enough to understand what was good and what was faulty in the lines of their own dwelling. Astronomy he taught her directly from the stars, the whole wide heavens being spread out invitingly before their eyes like a map done in blue and gold. But in history he contented himself with what she gleaned from the Bible and Shakespeare and the ancient classics. What was gained, he obstinately demanded, by stuffing a little maid's brain with dates of assassinations and pestilences and atrocities, or with the accessions of kings and queens who for the most part were best forgotten? In literature he as unhesitatingly laid all the modern

writers aside. They might or might not be good, —that the future would decide. His library was a large one, and, having been begun by others, contained much outside of his own lines, and Agnes was free to browse there at pleasure. Still from her father's hands she should receive nothing save what Time had consecrated as its best. So she learned Greek and Latin and Italian, that she might read the ancient poets in the divine music that no English sounds can fitly render, and she learned no other languages. "Where is the need?" Mr. Alden asked. "There is no other literature."

Mrs. Goodwin, from her sofa in the book-room, looked on in unacquiescent silence, her eyebrows lifted drolly and her lips pursed up in condemnation. Her brother-in-law was, of course, at liberty to mould his daughter's mind as he pleased. All the same, as a practical and strictly utilitarian aunt, she might well fear lest a damsel brought up on the winged words and Olympian ways of classic heroes should find the modern ones little to her liking when the time for liking came.

That the time was already come, whether or not any presentiment of it had quickened her niece's pulses, Mrs. Goodwin was thoroughly convinced. Moreover, the hero was come. And surely, where unprejudiced by mental association with Apollo-like beings in armour that shone like the sun or clashed like a thousand thunders, no girl could turn a deaf ear to Godfrey Kilpatrick's merry laugh, or look unmoved into his brown eyes. He was the son, and now the assistant, of their family physician and

friend, and the very best that could be said of him was that he was worthy of his father — and that he in no wise resembled his mother, as Mrs. Goodwin invariably added, with a puckering of the corners of her mouth that meant much. It was astonishing what that mouth of hers could express without uttering a sound. For being an exceedingly plain woman at the best, she did not hesitate to distort her features into any additional ugliness that helped to illustrate her meaning; and having many opinions, and never being debarred from advancing any one of them by cowardly doubts as to its acceptability to her hearer, her face was seldom in repose.

Godfrey Kilpatrick had been a favourite of hers from boyhood, and she liked him better than ever now that he was a man, for the reason, she maintained, that she adored brown beards. Mr. Alden liked him, too, which was unusual, for ordinarily he classed young men with modern literature as values of questionable quantity till pronounced upon by Time, and until then to be kept undusted on upper shelves. But Godfrey, besides being the most sunny-hearted fellow in the world, had a strong point in his favour in the possession of an inexhaustible fund of humour. Mr. Alden could not but approve of him.

As for Agnes, she, too, liked Godfrey well, though having always known him, their friendship lacked the interesting element of uncertainty and surprise attending new acquaintanceships, where the soul, like the pioneer of an unexplored country, makes a discovery at every turn. She had nothing to explore

in Godfrey. She knew him from cover to cover like her Homer. She saw clearly enough, therefore, that he loved her, but even that fact had not come as a revelation, so gradually had the deeper feeling grown out of his early liking, making it seem a thing that had existed always. He had said no syllable on the subject. Nevertheless, every one knew his secret, and all conveyed their knowledge of it to Agnes, still without the use of words, while in the same delicate manner asserting that she returned his feeling. There is no refuting a syllogism unexpressed in language. Agnes could not challenge their unformulated belief. Nor was she prepared to do so, not being certain of her sentiments nor inclined to their analysis. Godfrey was very kind, very useful, very pleasant to have around. She was not ready to put him permanently out of her life.

Was this love? Perhaps. But there was no haste to know.

CHAPTER II

THE LISTENING NIGHT

. . . the Day, about to yield his breath,
Utters the stars unto the listening Night.

—LANIER.

SO the nineteenth century had reached the beginning of the fifties, that tranquil period in American history before the first whisper of the coming internecine struggle had broken its peace, and when the mental life of the country still ran in conventional and quiet grooves, unvexed by those subtle questionings and irreconcilable problems that agitate the thinking world of to-day.

It was the third of June and Agnes Alden's birthday, and her friend Clara Dean, Godfrey, and his father were dining at Old Oaks. Mrs. Kilpatrick, by the intervention of Providence, had a rheumatic affection which kept her at home, where, as Mrs. Goodwin hopefully remarked, with two doctors to physic her she stood a fair chance of coming to a very good end. Meantime it was an entirely congenial party that gathered on the front terrace after dinner, the elders established in easy chairs and the doctor lazily smoking, while the three young people sat on gay-coloured rugs flung over the broad

stone steps. Dr. Kilpatrick, an alert, wiry little man with a shock of iron-grey hair and a clever, fine-cut face, was on terms of lifelong intimacy and disagreement with his hosts, and knew no greater pleasure than spending an evening in their society, sparring with Mrs. Goodwin, who never allowed him to get the better of her, and affectionately contradicting Mr. Alden at every turn. He was a generous-hearted, delightful man, genial and provocative, and whenever he was at Old Oaks the best of his friends' wit was at his service. Clara Dean, a pleasant-faced, tiny creature, of whom Mr. Alden regretfully alleged that she could not see through a joke though it were made of glass, listened unparticipantly save for a look of wondering interest as the merry banter flew around the circle. She had her guitar across her lap and fingered it softly from time to time, the sounds chiming in with the talk like sleepy bird-notes; and later, when the laughter came to a pause, she and Godfrey sang song after song to it, their voices blending charmingly. Agnes sat by silent, her hands folded in her lap, less conscious of the singing than of the scent of the early roses which floated up to her out of the dusky places of the lawns, and by degrees her thoughts wandered off along byways of her own where no one could have followed if he would. Suddenly there fell over her that unaccountable loneliness which at one time or another all hearts know. The sense of some vague unmet need came to her like a revelation of mental orphanhood. With her nearest and dearest of kin about her she saw herself unrelated in spirit to

any, and recognized with dismay that her soul was, as was every soul, an isolated atom alone in a crowded universe with its ineffaceable individuality and all its unfulfilled, inexpressible desires. The knowledge hurt, as does so much of the irremediable wisdom of the world.

The coloured lamp that swung in the vestibule behind them threw a subdued roseate glow over her, and Godfrey, watching her as he sang, finally stopped abruptly. Clara instantly broke off, too, laying down the guitar with an air of injured resignation. Godfrey leaned toward Agnes and touched her arm.

"We are still here, Agnes. Do take an express back to us!"

The mist cleared from her eyes. Everything grew familiar and normal again.

"I was not so far away," she said apologetically. "I was only in the wishing country. Everybody has one foot there all the time, you know."

"But you have not an earthly thing left to wish for," Clara objected. "What do you want now?"

"I do not want anything that can be held in the hand and looked at," Agnes answered half impatiently. "I want something that is not in me. I do not know what it is, but I shall not be happy till I have found out, and then I shall be miserable till I have gotten it."

She ended with a deprecatory laugh that did not conceal a real discontent, and Clara looked at her in the disapproving surprise with which so many regard all that they do not understand.

"I thought you were ideally happy, Agnes. You ought to be."

"With every ideal hopelessly beyond me?" Agnes said wistfully.

"Bring them down within gunshot, then," suggested Godfrey, sensibly. "What is the use of aiming at the sun hoping to hit the moon? Better aim at the moon in the first place. It is unhealthy living at that sort of stretch. I believe in reals, not ideals, as working hypotheses, except"—he looked at Agnes, and a charming light flashed into his clear brown eyes—"except where I see an ideal realized."

"What is that about ideals?" broke in Dr. Kilpatrick, tossing away a cigar stump with a vigorous out-throw of the arm. "By the way, Agnes, I have brought you a whole book of them for a birthday present. Where did I put it! Confound these dress suits with their atrophied pockets! Look it up in my overcoat, will you, Godfrey?"

At the magnetic word "book" Mr. Alden's passive face brightened into interest.

"What have you brought her, Matt? Anything as good as the *Pastorals* of Theocritus? I gave her those this morning."

The doctor lighted another cigar.

"Oh, it is just a book of poems I ran across on a bookstall, looking as out of place in its trashy surroundings as you would. It has been some time in print, but it seems to have only lately attracted the attention of the critics. It was a notice I saw that put me on the track of it. There Agnes." He

tossed a thin, plainly bound volume into her lap. "All right, child. A kiss will do for thanks."

"Poems, did you say?" Mr. Alden inquired, leaning forward. "The *Vita Nuova*, perhaps? I had some thought of getting her that myself."

"Bless you, no, Jeff! It is a modern poet—an altogether new man. What is his name, Agnes?"

Agnes bent over the book, her young eyes barely able to decipher the title in the dim light from the lamp.

"'*Poems. By David Mulgrave*'," she read aloud.

"A modern poet!" ejaculated Mrs. Goodwin, lifting her ill-matched eyebrows comically. "He will find himself as out of place here as on the book-stall. Contemporaries are in evil odour in our library, you know, Doctor."

"My dear Jane," expostulated Mr. Alden, "what are you talking about? All the great poets of the world hold honoured places on our shelves."

"All the dead ones, you mean, Jefferson," replied Mrs. Goodwin, composedly. "They are here in state, every dried-out ghost of them, but without a living poet near to put a little warm blood into their veins."

"Living poet!" echoed Mr. Alden, contemptuously. "There are no living poets. Shakespeare was our last, or—well, no, perhaps Milton, or Cowper, even. Cowper has some fine passages."

"How about Tennyson and the Brownings?" asked Dr. Kilpatrick, carefully knocking off the ash of his cigar upon the gravel. "They are making

not altogether despicable reputations. You don't cast them out with the rank and file, do you ?"

"Tennyson ? The Brownings ?" repeated Mr. Alden, indifferently, resettling his spectacles. "I have never read them. Don't want to. I saw a picture of Tennyson the other day—long hair and a brigand hat. Don't tell me *he* can write anything worth placing alongside of this. Listen !" And straightening his spare figure, his thin fingers interlocked and a flush of enjoyment gradually overspreading his delicate face, Mr. Alden began reciting a passage from the *Iliad*, in tones so full, so round, and so singularly melodious that the delicious Greek accents were music on his lips. "And where are descriptions to compare with these ?" he went on, quoting bit after bit from Æschylus and Sophocles. "Or where will you equal this for dignified simplicity and grandeur ?" he added, winding up with a beautiful old Latin hymn. "There !" he concluded, looking round triumphantly at his spell-bound audience. "Match me any of that in your little penny-a-liners of to-day, if you can!"

A silence ensued. The fineness of his rendering seemed to gain him his point unchallenged. Then the doctor moved his seat to break the charm, laying his hand affectionately on his friend's knee.

"Pooh, Jeff! You are an arrant cheat. It all lies in that resonant pipe of yours. You would make the almanac sound like the muezzin's call to prayer. As to poetry, though, there is no real use for it. This is a hard grind of a world, full of obstinate facts and ugly truths, and you can't jingle

them away with rhyming falsehoods. Better stick to prose."

"And leave my new book unread?" asked Agnes, mischievously.

A kindly look came into the doctor's keen blue eyes as they rested on her.

"My dear," he said gallantly, "you are a poem yourself, and the man who reads music into you as your father reads it into Homer, will be the poet of your future."

His eyes passed from the girl's face to his son's, and the smile on his clean-shaven lips grew very sweet. But Agnes missed it. She was looking down at her book.

Clara was to remain over-night, and in view of the compensatory bedtime talk in store she remained silent the evening through, wearing all the time that look of holding in reserve an intelligent and dissenting opinion, which seems to belong to those credited with an extra amount of common-sense. When the two girls were alone in their room she began at once.

"Did you really mean what you implied this evening, Agnes—that you are not perfectly happy? *You?* Why, I would change places with you in a minute, and so would any girl I know. You are ungrateful."

"Am I?" returned Agnes, opening the window wide and leaning far out for another look at the night. "I can't help wanting more — wanting the best."

Clara leaned out beside her, looking down and

pushing about the crumbs of mortar on the window-sill.

"You have the best already, Agnes. You don't realize how good Fate is to you."

"But my life is so narrow," Agnes complained, "so — I don't know what — petty, I think. It has nothing more in it than shows on the face of it. I want —" She drew back into the room and flung up her head, lifting her shapely arms and clasped hands above it. "Oh, I hate incompleteness!" she broke out. "I want to become all that I can be — all that I ever could be. Something in me is asleep and is waiting to be roused. I am not fully myself. I shall not be till I am all awake. Do you never feel like that, Clara? Can't you understand what I mean?"

"No," said Clara, bluntly. "I can't. What is there to hinder you from being yourself? Nobody fetters you. You are not one of the new women demanding more liberty, are you? You don't want to vote, do you? Or to smoke? Or anything like that?"

Agnes burst out laughing and threw her arms about Clara's tiny figure, bending over her to rub her cheek affectionately against the girl's rough hair.

"No, no! I don't. O you dear goosey, you can't see anything that is not down in black and white, and I cannot put this so; it is too vague. I feel it all the same, though, and it hurts."

"Then stop thinking about it," Clara advised. "One can always get rid of a thought by thinking about something else."

"But I don't want to get rid of this except by

living it out. It is a part of me. I have got to live it out. There! Don't let us talk of it any more. You don't understand. Nobody does."

She moved away to raise the light, and, catching sight of the new book, took it up and idly turned over the leaves, till a line arresting her attention she began to read and instantly became absorbed. Clara was silent for a time, devoting herself methodically to the business in hand of preparing for bed. Then she asked curiously:

"What does Dr. Kilpatrick say to it—young Dr. Kilpatrick, I mean?"

"Godfrey?" said Agnes, unconcernedly, barely lifting her eyes. "Oh, I never talk about such things with Godfrey. He would not know what in the world I meant, he is so matter-of-fact."

Clara's lips drew into a thin, straight line.

"He is everything that a man ought to be," she said stiffly. "He is the nicest man in Battleborough. All the girls think so. You never appreciate him, Agnes."

"Yes, I do," answered Agnes, absently. "O Clara, listen to this!"

"Don't!" begged Clara. "I don't want to listen. I don't care for poetry."

"But you would care for this, Clara. You could not help it. This is fire struck from a man's soul! *Do* hear this!"

She read out a few lines, but, pausing for comment and finding that Clara had stopped her ears, she went on to herself, while Clara doggedly continued to disrobe.

"Does Dr. Kilpatrick care for poetry?" came at last from the bed.

Agnes looked up unseeingly.

"What? Who? Godfrey? Oh, no! Of course he would not. Did n't you hear him say he does not care for ideals?"

Clara twisted her head into the pillows.

"He cares for you," she persisted, a crease coming between her eyebrows. "And he said — it was as good as saying it—that you were ideal."

"That is only talk," Agnes replied lightly. "He does not know what ideal means. How you do keep bringing everything around to Godfrey!"

There was silence again. Agnes read on. Clara took a little nap, then woke with a start to see Agnes still fully dressed and standing under the light with her book.

"Agnes! Agnes!" she protested sleepily. "Are you not ever coming to bed?"

"One moment, Clara dear."

And Clara dozed off to waken again and find Agnes attired for the night, but still standing by the light, white and ghostly, her rich hair unbound and rippling superbly around her, an idle brush in one down-dropped hand, the open book in the other.

"O Agnes!" she called forlornly.

"Are you awake, dear?" Agnes asked eagerly. "You *must* let me read you just this. It is so strong — so joyous — like the lark at heaven's gate! Why, I did not suppose there was a man living who could write as this man writes!"

"Show the book to your father," murmured Clara drowsily, with a spice of malice. "It may convert him from the ancients."

Agnes looked up, a smile coming to her lips. She glanced toward the bed. Clara was asleep again. "No," she said to herself softly, closing the book suddenly and holding it tightly against her breast. "What is here is mine. No one else shall have it."

CHAPTER III

THE YEAR 'S AT THE SPRING

The year 's at the spring,
. . . . . .
The lark 's on the wing.

—R. BROWNING.

FOR the next few days Agnes was engrossed with her new treasure. Her familiarity from childhood with the acknowledged best of the world's literature had educated her mind to a critical discernment unusual in one of her years, and recognizing a master hand in the pages of this tiny volume she hailed it with the enthusiasm of the art-lover. As her admiration for the work increased she grew ashamed of keeping such a feast to herself, and she brought the book at last to her father.

"Pater, I have a surprise for you," she said, bending lovingly over the back of his chair. "This book Dr. Kilpatrick gave me — it is a classic! For loftiness of thought and power of imagery, truly, it reminds one of Dante. You will have to read it."

Mr. Alden put up a frail hand and waved her aside.

"Read it yourself if you must, my dear, for sake of the donor, though it is time lost from better things, but don't inflict it on me."

"But Pater," Agnes urged, slipping the book

open-faced across the pages of the Ovid upon which his eyes were bent, "the merest glance will convince you. This is no pretender. This is a poet."

"There are no poets nowadays," Mr. Alden declared in that tone of mild decision more hopeless to combat than virulent opposition, as he quietly closed her book and handed it back, smoothing down the pages of his Ovid as if they had been desecrated by the contact. "Poets are gone out of fashion. There are rhymsters instead, and in plenty. I used occasionally to see their verses in the periodicals, all sickly sentiment and foolish rhymes—loves doves, wings rings, hearts darts, and so on *ad nauseam*. I have never bothered with modern poetry since. Homer is good enough for me."

"But these poems are of the highest order," Agnes persisted, resenting a verdict without a trial. "I never read anything so inspiring, and their melodiousness has a quality like that of Schubert's songs. Some day the man who wrote them will be recognized as a great poet."

"I don't doubt he is that already — in his own estimation," said Mr. Alden with a chuckle, returning to his reading. "The public will bow down to him soon enough in any case. In the olden times poets were crowned, but now that a bandit hat takes the place of the laurel, fame is easier won."

"O Pater!" Agnes expostulated, between laughter and vexation. But she pressed the point no further. And Mrs. Goodwin, when in turn the book was offered to her, screwed her mouth up into

a knot, remarking: "Poems? Good Heavens! I would rather read *Burton on Melancholy.*"

All the same, as Agnes pored over the verses, knowing many of them by heart before she realized it, she became increasingly convinced that her first impressions were correct. She began to question her friends about the book. Had they read it? What did they think of it? But no. It was the work of a new writer; and who reads an unknown author — especially a poet — before the critics have settled his standing?

Godfrey, however, was delighted that his father's chance gift had met with such favour, and when Agnes, longing to share her pleasure with some one, insisted upon reciting one of the poems to him, he listened with rapt attention, assuring her when she turned to him for comment that her voice was as wonderful as her father's, only that it was still more deliciously musical. But as to the poem, she soon found that he had not heard the first word of it, and at her look of reproach he unblushingly admitted poetry to be so dead a language to him that she might quite as well have recited it in Sanscrit. It nearly made a quarrel between them.

He had ridden out that afternoon, as he often did, for a few moments' chat, calling up to her where she sat in her open window as he rode beneath it; and they were now strolling along the carriage drive under the overhanging trees, he with his arm across his horse's neck and the bridle slung loosely over his wrist, and she with her broad hat swinging in one hand and her white gown gathered up from the

ground in the other, just the tips of her dainty slippers showing as she walked. It was an ideal day. Birds were singing everywhere. White and yellow butterflies were chasing each other flutteringly up and up toward the blue. The air was soft and sweet and full of that sparkle of vitality which makes it so good a thing only to be alive. Godfrey felt acutely that it was no time to disagree.

"I should think you might try to be more appreciative," Agnes said petulantly. "It is no pleasure now to discuss poetry with you."

Godfrey came to a halt where the road turned and a cedar hedge made a dense cool shade.

"Poetry will never be in my line, I am afraid," he said, with a laugh in his eyes. "Compound fractures come easier. But I like to hear you talk about it. Is not that the same thing?"

"No, not in the least," Agnes returned severely. Then she looked at him contemplatively with calm, dispassionate eyes. "It is strange how little we have in common, Godfrey, you and I."

"But liking is not based only on similarity of tastes," Godfrey said stoutly. "There is a better foundation for it than merely caring for the same books, is n't there? You do find just a little to like in me, don't you, Agnes, even though I may be a numskull about poetry?"

Agnes looked the goodly young fellow all over judicially as he stood confidently before her in his close-fitting riding suit, booted and spurred like a knight. He was of his father's short stature and trim build, and had his kindly keen look combined

with the same humorousness of expression, while every line indicated so clearly the honesty and cleanliness of his character that it was impossible to regard him altogether with indifference. A smile stole by degrees into the grave eyes which were so nearly on a level with his own, and at sight of it his face brightened.

"Then, leaving out poetry, you do find a little in me—just a little—to like?" he asked coaxingly.

"No," Agnes said simply, with perfect sincerity, "not a little. A great deal."

The blood mounted in Godfrey's cheeks.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "if I but dared tell you all I find to — to like — to care for — in you! Agnes, may I tell you?"

The abrupt change in his manner startled her out of her security.

"Please not!" she said hurriedly, lifting her hands as if to ward him off. "I don't want to hear it." Then, dismayed at the look that came into his face, she added more gently: "At least — not yet."

He dropped bridle and whip and came nearer, while the horse turned to the roadside bank and bent its slender neck to nibble at the grass, unconcerned by anything they might say or feel. The honeyed breath of the locust blossoms floated past. Near by a Phœbe-bird called urgently to its mate.

"But some day, Agnes? May I tell you some day — all of it?"

Her eyes fell before his. Her heart beat fast, and her colour went and came. She drew back, trem-

bling, afraid, uncertain. Oh, that palpitating moment when Friendship first unmasks, revealing itself for the diviner thing called Love!

"I—I don't know," she faltered. "How can I tell? How do I know that I shall ever want to hear it?" She made an effort to break the spell and to return with him into the safer regions of their past. "How foolish you are, Godfrey — how foolish we both are!" she said, attempting to laugh and only succeeding in catching her breath. "Of course we both like each other very much — and that is all there is to be said about it."

"By Jove, it is not all!" Godfrey cried recklessly. "That is but the beginning of it! Agnes!—*Dear!*"

Long and familiar as their friendship had been, it was the first term of endearment he had ever used. Agnes felt it like a breaking down of the bars between them. Without word or look she turned precipitately and fled.

Godfrey stood rooted to the spot watching her flight. The white figure glimmered between the trees as she sped up the hill to the house, flitted across the vine-covered porch at the rear, and disappeared through the open doorway. Then he heard the door slide to behind her, and knew it for a sign that he was not to follow. There was nothing left for him but to pick up his whip, jam down his cap on his head, spring into the saddle, and ride away. But as he did so he kept repeating two words out of all that she had said: "Not yet. Not yet." And his face was by no means hopeless as he rode on down under the trembling arch of green.

Agnes took refuge in her bedroom and closed and locked the door upon herself. The crucial moment was staved off, but she knew now that it was for a time only. Sooner or later it must be faced. Yes or No, which would it be at last? Her heart was beating high — was it with fear or love? How was she to know? What did love look like when it came? Should she know it in her own face as she had known it by instinct in Godfrey's?

She went to the mirror and stood before it an instant shamefacedly with dropped lids, then lifted them suddenly. A young startled face looked back at her from the glass with widely dilated pupils in two star-like, magnificent eyes, and a mouth of quivering scarlet. She gave the reflection one ashamed glance and drew back no wiser than before. Could that be love?

"Not yet," she, too, said to herself as she turned away. "I do not want to love. Not yet!"

CHAPTER IV

MAN IS HIS OWN STAR

Man is his own star, and the soul that can
Render an honest and a perfect man
Commands all light, all influence, all fate.
—J. FLETCHER.

GODFREY did not come to Old Oaks again for some days, and in the meantime his father was sent for by Mrs. Goodwin to attend Mr. Alden, who had one of his occasional malarial attacks, and who, as usual, strenuously refused medical advice. However, as he could not well decline to see his old friend if he came, Mrs. Goodwin summoned him undauntedly, and chancing to look out of the book-room window some time after, Mr. Alden caught sight of the well-known coupé turning in at the gate.

"Here, Jane," he called out in no pleased tones. "Here is that doctor driving up like mad. I suppose you sent him word that I was dying. Just tell him, will you, before he comes in, that he shall try none of his poisonous drugs on me? I prefer to die at my own gait."

Agnes rose nervously to her feet. It was scarcely likely that Godfrey had mentioned their last interview to his father; nevertheless she felt strongly disinclined to face Dr. Kilpatrick yet. So slipping

away, she busied herself in her little upstairs sitting-room until the approach of a glorious sunset drew her irresistibly to a balcony. There she perched herself on the balustrade and sat looking off, now at the blazing west, and now at the distant town bejewelled by the slanting rays into an Old Testament city, with foundations of sapphires, windows of agate, gates of carbuncles, and all its borders made of pleasant stones. As she sat there, steeping her soul in the beauty of it, Dr. Kilpatrick ran down the front steps with the agility of a much younger man. He was springing into his coupé when he caught sight of her and paused.

"Are you there, child?" he called out affectionately. "How do you do, and good-bye. Can't wait to see you. Left your father something that will cure him in no time."

The carriage door slammed to upon the words, but as he was being whirled away his head reappeared at the window.

"Agnes!" he shouted up. "I met that fellow —Mulgrave, you know—wants to see the view—will bring him some evening — full moon — new poem perhaps — who knows?" And the laughing eyes and iron-grey head vanished.

Agnes gazed after the coupé in bewilderment. Her friends were constantly asking permission to show some one or other the view from their tower, which, being the highest point in the country, commanded an unrivalled panorama. But who was coming now? Could it be David Mulgrave that Dr. Kilpatrick meant?

She flew down impetuously to the book-room, bursting in upon its quiet like a creature from another sphere. Mrs. Goodwin was not there, but her father, in dressing-gown and slippers,— his sole concession to his temporary invalidism,— sat peacefully at work over a microscope, wearing the most benignant expression possible. He welcomed Agnes delightedly, instantly rising from his seat to give place to her.

"I was about to call you, my dear. Here is a new slide that good old Matt brought me,—the wing of a beetle,— the only prescription he left. Wise man. He knew I would set a match to any other. Look at it, my dear. Look at it."

"Yes, Pater. But tell me first, what did Dr. Kilpatrick mean? He called out something—I did not understand—about bringing somebody—'Mulgrave,' he said — to see our view. Whom did he mean?"

Mr. Alden looked blank, then vaguely recollected.

"Oh, yes, he spoke to us about it,—asked if he might bring him. Why, what was his name? Mulgrave what? I really forget. But *you* know. It is that fellow who wrote the book that outdoes Dante and the rest."

"*David* Mulgrave? *That* David Mulgrave? O Pater!"

"Why not *that* David Mulgrave? Why should n't he want to see a view like any other man? Now look in here, Agnes. This is as fine a thing in its way as the view is. Or wait. Let me adjust the lens to your eye."

"But how did he come to know him?" asked Agnes, still incredulous.

"The beetle, child? Oh, Matt is a clever fellow enough — outside of his profession. He knew it at once."

"No, no, Pater. Mr. Mulgrave."

"Oh, they met professionally, I think he said. Probably the poet got an earache listening to his own verses and wanted some soothing drops. Now that is right. There! Sit down. Did you ever see anything more delicately intricate than that network, Agnes?"

"No," Agnes replied obediently.

"And the colours. Do you see how marvellously they blend?"

"Yes," Agnes said.

Mr. Alden's face was radiant with scientific interest. He laid a loving hand on his daughter's shoulder.

"Do you realize, my dear, that what you are looking at appears to you two thousand times larger than it really is, and that all that beauty is always there, and is only lost to you ordinarily through the inadequacy of your natural vision? Oh, how infinitely the marvels of nature transcend any possible marvels of man!"

"No—yes," Agnes murmured, with her eye at the lens and her thoughts upon the meeting that was to be. So it was David Mulgrave who was coming. Would he be like his poems? Was he young or old? How soon would he come? Would she have long to wait?

"When will it be full moon, Pater?" she asked, getting up from her seat.

"Yesterday week," Mr. Alden answered mechanically, promptly taking her place, but springing up again with an apology as Agnes gave an impatient sigh. "Pray excuse me, my dear! I did not intend to hurry you. Take all the time you will."

"I want to take Time himself by the forelock," Agnes said with a merry laugh, pushing her father down into the chair and laying playful hold of his scant, fine hair with both hands. "O you dear old Pater! If you knew what a foolish thing you had for a daughter!" And then she kissed him hard on both cheeks, and went away, leaving him smiling and uncomprehending and happy.

So there were six days to wait before it would be full moon. Agnes made no further reference to the promised visit, nor was it alluded to by the others, but each morning she awoke out of her healthful, dreamless slumber with an undefined feeling of expectancy that was in itself a joy.

"Two days now," she told herself as the fourth day neared its close. "If only they were coming this evening! There can never be another such night."

The family was on the terrace as usual, and, leaving her father and aunt to their after-dinner coffee, she wandered off through the grounds, lured from one lovely path into another and singing snatches of song as she walked. She had little of a voice,

but it was true and sweet, and chimed in suitably with the many small outdoor noises that made the night so musical. Her pale blue gown showed white in the moonlight; she was full of that subtle, causeless happiness that is so illusive and so young; and as she walked slowly along, her bright face upturned to watch the climbing moon, she looked as Galatea may have looked when she tasted of life for the first time. Suddenly she lowered her eyes, attracted by a sound that did not accord with the solitude, and saw a swiftly moving shadow advancing between the trees. She stopped short, startled, and her singing ceased.

"Pardon me," said a voice, and at its first accent her alarm passed. "Dr. Kilpatrick sent me from the house to find you and bring you back."

With the words a young man came up and stood beside her, his hat in his hand. The moonlight fell full upon him now, showing a tall, strongly knit figure instinct with vitality, and a face as high-bred as unusual, and remarkable for a pair of dark eyes which seemed to concentrate in their glance all that the man was in character, mind, and heart.

Her colour returned as she looked at him.

"Oh, is it you?" she exclaimed joyously.

"But you do not know me," he replied. "Let me——"

"Yes, I know you," she interrupted eagerly. "You are David Mulgrave, and I am Agnes Alden." And then, because she saw that he was what she had wanted him to be, she smiled at him as at an old friend. He held out his hand involuntarily.

" I am glad that I need not introduce myself."

" Your book has done that," she answered, laying her cool, soft hand in his. " I know you for always already."

" Is life-acquaintanceship so easy a thing as to be made through a single book ? " he asked lightly, as they turned toward the house.

" Yes, when it is a book like yours."

" But how can you know me by it when I do not know myself yet ? "

" Do you not ? " Agnes asked naïvely. " I know myself through and through."

A look of amusement flashed into his eyes.

" You are fortunate, then, for the surprises of our own natures form life's strangest experiences to the most of us, complete self-knowledge being usually a prerogative of age." He spoke playfully, but there was something stimulating in his personality. Agnes felt it as if she had entered a rarer atmosphere. She looked up at him seriously.

" How can we help knowing ourselves when we make our own characters ? "

" Can we all do that, Miss Alden ? If each individuality is the outcome of inherited tendencies, can it become anything else than what it is born to be ? "

Agnes hesitated.

" Theoretically not, I suppose. Yet I can argue only from my own feelings, and, as far as character is concerned, I feel that I could certainly grow to be what I tried to be—that is, if I tried hard enough."

" We should not dare believe otherwise as regards

ourselves, or we would have no incentive to effort," David returned quickly. " But for others—" He broke off.

" Well ? And for others ? "

" I ask your pardon," he answered gravely. " You surprised me into thinking aloud. Heaven forbid that I should hint to any human being that the will to make the effort might not be his birthright."

" It is mine, anyway," Agnes insisted, with a backward fling of her head that was full of spirit and character. " I know it because I feel it."

They had come out upon the road, over which the unshadowed moon cast a subdued refulgence like a sanctified daylight. David's compelling eyes seemed to challenge her soul to disclose itself.

" Have you learned, then, that in the having or not having of that will lies every human creature's chance of happiness ? " he asked.

" But if all cannot choose to help themselves that would damn some persons' future from the start," Agnes objected, surprised, yet unafraid, at feeling herself like an open book under eyes that held their own thought in complete impenetrability, though apparently without intention of reserve.

" It does seem as if some could not so choose," he answered slowly. " And each can but live out the law of his own being, whatever it be. Yet after all, how can we tell positively who is, or is not, handicapped by a lack of will ? Or how can we be sure that further development may not come even to these in another life, helped on in some way by seemingly fruitless efforts here ? At any rate let us

hope so, for old Omar is only too true: heaven or hell lies for each of us within ourselves."

"Omar?" Agnes said interrogatively.

David shook off some overshadowing thought. His manner changed to a contagious brightness.

"Omar. He is one of the old Persian poets—the finest, I think, though I know him only through a friend,—an Orientalist. I hope his poems may find an adequate translator some day. You, however, are hardly old enough yet to care for him.

"I am twenty-one," Agnes returned a little defiantly.

David laughed.

"It is emotion and thought that determine age, you know, so it is too soon in our acquaintance for either of us to judge how old the other is. As years count, though, I am thirty-two."

"And how old is Omar as thought counts?"

"As old as the first thinker and as young as the last-born cynic," David answered.

He was looking down at her with frank interest, and a crowd of questions hurried to her lips. But by now they had reached the terrace, where Dr. Kilpatrick was waiting and beguiling the time with a tremendous discussion with Mrs. Goodwin, who had accidentally been drawn into arguing on the opposite side from her convictions, while he was valiantly doing the same for mere love of breezy difference. He was rapidly being worsted, however, and though Mrs. Goodwin was only bringing him round to his own opinion he hailed David's coming as a deliverance from an ignominious defeat.

" Here at last," he exclaimed, springing to his feet. " Now come on. I have two or three patients still to see in Fairfields, and must be off presently. So let us have this cyclorama of yours without delay. Lead on, Agnes. Come along, Jeff. The climb will help your malaria as much as the beetle-wing did. Think up a braver argument while we are gone, Mrs. Goodwin. That last lacked backbone. Now, Mulgrave."

Agnes led the way across the dimly lighted rotunda, and up the grand stairway to the gallery above, and opened the door leading to the tower. Here the steps wound up and up, dark save for a faint reflection from the hall below, but increasingly light as they neared the observatory. A roof-piazza opened out from this point, and the doctor paused.

" This is enough of a pull for my old legs. What do you say, Jeff, to waiting here and getting out the telescope ? "

So Agnes and David went on alone up the remaining short flight of stairs. She hurried ahead, and, pushing back the sliding door at the summit, stepped out upon the tower and threw a triumphant glance around.

" Look ! " she said exultingly as he followed.

David's eyes kindled as his gaze swept the horizon. At the base of the hill the great city, harmoniously indistinct and amethystine in the distance, lay spread out nearly a score of miles, dotted with lights as with stars and overhung with a soft pale shimmer like a shadow of the Milky Way. Over the bay that

bounded it on the west with a circlet of quivering blue, phantom craft glided on separate and lonely ways, while across the sky shredded clouds drifted in groups diaphanous and dim, like the ghosts of some lost armada haunting celestial seas. High over all rode the moon, flooding city, bay, and forest with her unearthly glory, and resolving the far-off ocean line at the east into a long curve of flashing silver.

Agnes stood with her eyes on David's face, noting its every change with deep gratification and feeling his immobility and speechlessness to be more eloquent than words. On the roof below, in full sight and sound, Mr. Alden and Dr. Kilpatrick, with the telescope between them, were wrangling amiably over the nature of Saturn's rings, every syllable of the good-natured dissension as audible as had the two parties been side by side. All the same Agnes felt as if she stood alone with David in a universe that no one but he had ever known how to enter,—a universe where sight was an inward sense of beauty, and where speech was superfluous for the interpreting of thought. When at last he drew back with a quick involuntary motion she looked at him comprehendingly.

"It is too beautiful. It almost pains, does it not?" she said. "But look down here. This is restful after the other."

She leaned over the balustrade and he looked down as she bade him. Below them the forest lay like an enchanted green sea hushed in sleep and dreaming odourous dreams. The moonlight flick-

ered and broke on the topmost boughs as on crested waves, dripping from leaf to leaf till the last golden drops plunged into the darkness underneath as into a fathomless abyss. The intermittent glimmer of fireflies below seemed the phosphorescence of midnight waters. Tiny breezes fluttered the branches, and all was in rippling, eddying, indistinct motion, as if the earth had half awakened and drawn a trembling breath that set the depths astir. The city, with its suggestion of human life and toil, appeared blotted from the world. Everywhere was that utmost of isolation and peace which belongs to mid-ocean solitudes.

David made a sound of inexpressible satisfaction.

"Think of growing up with this! What a living part of you it must be!"

"It is all of me," Agnes answered. "I was born here."

"What a birthright!" David exclaimed, his dark face aglow. "What breadth — what depth — what scope it should give!"

"Should it?" Agnes responded doubtfully. She hesitated a moment, then added impulsively: "To me my life seems a very narrow one."

"Narrow!" David echoed. "Narrow! With all this?" He made a sweeping gesture with both arms.

"But it is not our horizon that sets our boundaries, is it?" Agnes asked.

"No. I did not mean that. Of course it is according to our range of thought that we are broad or narrow. But you see—" he smiled down into her

sober face—" I do not credit you with a narrow mind; and given these surroundings,—such room as this for expansion, for growth,—truly, I must envy you a little."

Agnes looked gravely away, her eyes moving slowly from point to point of the landscape as if measuring its breadth. Was the narrowness at which she chafed not in externals then, but only in herself?

" I do not want to be narrow," she said impetuously. " What must I do — what must any one do to broaden himself?"

" Love more," David answered. " Don't you find that Love is the great developer?"

" Love what?" asked Agnes, lifting two surprised eyes to David's face.

" All things," he replied, with a look past her that seemed to take the entire universe to his heart. " To the broadly loving does not the rest necessarily follow? The soul with the widest sympathies must be the broadest soul."

Agnes pondered a moment.

" Loving is easy. I can do that, if that is all," she said simply.

And then again they were silent, while the unacrimonious dispute on the piazza below went merrily on.

" Hullo there, you two!" Dr. Kilpatrick finally called out, aiming a quinine pill with great nicety at the centre of David's shirt-front. " Come down, will you, or between us there will not be a shred of Saturn left."

So the little party returned to the terrace, with scarcely another word exchanged between the young people. There Mrs. Goodwin was in waiting for the doctor, armed with so formidable an argument that the little man fled incontinently, making his patients a convenient excuse for an ignoble flight and barely leaving David time for his adieux.

"So that is your poet, is it?" Mr. Alden remarked pleasantly to Agnes, patting her shoulder affectionately. "Surely you are mistaken. He can be no great poet. He wears his hair short and does not roll his eyes."

But Agnes only drew her father's hand to her lips and attempted no repartee. All that David Mulgrave's book had promised seemed to her realized in the writer.

CHAPTER V

A LANE INTO HEAVEN

And the slant yellow beam down the wood aisle doth seem
Like a lane into Heaven that leads from a dream.

—LANIER.

DAVID'S call naturally made no impression upon any of the family except Agnes, she being the only one who had had any conversation with him, and the casual visitor was not referred to again. But Agnes thought of little besides. She went over every incident of the short evening, going out to walk under the trees where she was when he came to her, and stopping at the precise point where she had paused then, smiling frankly at herself for recalling even the feeling of his hand in its firm, friendly grasp. Had she been an artist she could have drawn his face, so vividly did she remember the fine brow shaded by black hair, the strong nose, and powerful, handsome chin. But no artist could do justice to his eyes—deep-set, beautiful, and eloquent of that mysterious something which every human being feels, yet which only poets put into speech. The mouth was hidden under a heavy mustache. She would have to guess whether it were stern or tender. But she felt sure of its reserve and knew

instinctively that it could shut itself for ever on any word it chose. Altogether it was a strong, unforgettable face, and she kept recalling it with the look that had overspread it as he stepped out upon the tower. She knew exactly what he had felt at that instant, and she wondered if it might not inspire in him the poem that had so often stirred dumbly within herself, thrilling her through and through, though always eluding expression. It would be her poem, although he wrote it. She would ask him—and there she remembered that she had not invited him to repeat his visit, and that this meeting might be the only one of their lives. She stood still, overwhelmed by the thought. Then youth's dauntless confidence reasserted itself, and she walked on with a buoyant step, chiding herself for a needless panic. Of course she would see him again. Was not destiny bound to fulfil itself? As surely as each crystal atom found its fellow, so surely would that hidden force called fate bring their two paths again together.

And so fate did, and sooner than Agnes dreamed.

She was driving home one afternoon from a round of calls in Battleborough, when a slight accident befell the carriage, compelling her to leave it and return by the street cars, which ran not far from Old Oaks. She was unused to this mode of conveyance that had but recently been put into effect in the suburbs, and she so lost herself in a reverie that she missed the place where she should have alighted. When she remembered to look about her she found herself in Fairfields, a quaint spot just outside the city limits, consisting of a few fine old-fashioned

country-places united by an avenue of singularly beautiful elms whose branches met overhead, making a continuous Gothic arch of matchless grace.

Agnes hurriedly left the car and started to walk home by a cross-cut, nothing daunted by knowing that a part of the way led through an unfrequented lane. But she had gone only a few paces, when upon reaching a bend in the avenue she came face to face with David Mulgrave.

"You!" she exclaimed. "Here?"

"Why not? I live here. You are much more of a surprise to me than I should be to you. Are you walking back? By yourself?"

Agnes explained the situation as he turned and walked on at her side.

"You must allow me the pleasure of seeing you home," he said. "I could not let you take that deserted road alone."

"I am not afraid, but I shall enjoy the walk much more if you come too," Agnes answered frankly. "Besides, we did not finish our talk the other night."

He looked at her again with the warm personal interest that he took in every human being, which is so different a thing from the conventional attention of politeness.

"Are many conversations more than beginnings, Miss Alden? Do you expect to carry every thought out to its end?"

"I should like to," Agnes said, with her direct, bright glance, full of trust and wholly devoid of coquetry. "I should like each thought to be fin-

ished and distinct, so that I could stand away from it and consider it from every side. I want to see the thing itself always and not mere suggestions of it."

" ' " I am half-sick of shadows," said
The Lady of Shalott,' "

quoted David, smilingly.

" Who is the Lady of Shalott ?" asked Agnes, with the bluntness of ignorance. " I never heard of her."

"Never heard of Tennyson's poem of that name ?"

" I have not read any modern poets," Agnes said deprecatingly. " I do not know Tennyson at all."

" Not at all ? The foremost of living poets ? Oh, what a revelation for you! It should be worth having missed him till now to read him for the first time when capable of appreciating him."

" Is he so fine as that ?" Agnes asked wistfully. " What is he like ?"

" Would you care to hear *The Lady of Shalott ?* I believe I can repeat the whole of it."

She assented eagerly, and verse by verse he recited Tennyson's perfect poem to her, as they turned down a road that was scarcely more than a shaded footpath between banks of moss, with tangled hedges of blackberry vines and eglantine on either hand. The sunlight fell slantingly through the trees and cast long spear-like shadows at their feet. There was an aromatic woodsy smell all about, and a hardly distinguishable tremulous little sound like the fluttering of innumerable small wings.

The beauty of the way and the beauty of the poem seemed one.

Agnes listened intently, her pale summer silk rustling softly with each slow step, her head uplifted, her eyelids dropped, her lips parted, her breath coming and going unevenly, her exquisite appreciation manifest in every line of her face. David fancied that if she had been reading the poem to herself he could have told by her varying expression what words she read.

"*Oh!*" she exclaimed, clasping her hands and looking up at him as he finished. "*Oh!*"

She could say nothing more, but she felt that he understood her, and they went silently on down the beautiful lane that seemed to her to be leading straight to Camelot.

"Every one gives his own interpretation to that poem," David observed after a pause. "What does it mean to you?"

Agnes reflected, and again as he watched her face he fancied that he saw her thought take shape.

"To give a meaning to it," she answered presently, looking far down the road with eyes that saw the fabled city in the sheeny distance, "seems like trying to read a moral into a flower — it is full of such vague, elusive, half hints of things. It appeals to one subtly, like a perfume. I hardly know what it most means to me. It is the Ideal, perhaps, high above us all and never seen face to face, but heard by our hearts like a haunting melody. Then the mirror might be the knowledge of the actual world, and the web the perfect life — the perfect

blending of Reality with the Ideal. And the curse is only the old curse that is upon us all when we let go of the Ideal, even though it be to follow earth's best. There is no other end possible after that. It is moral death. However,—" she was still looking off at Camelot, and far away through the trees she caught the flashing of a golden helmet and the tossing of a yellow plume,—" I am not sure but that I prefer the poem just as a love-story without any meaning. The beautiful, lonely, hungry heart, dreaming of love as the starving dream of a feast, and at its first approach abandoning all for its sake — dying for its sake — oh, how it is told, and what an intensity of feeling was compressed into that single day of loving that was all she had! One could envy her her doom."

" But it was her weakness, not her love, that was her doom," David said, looking at Agnes and seeing in her stead the Lady of Shalott. " That was the curse that was upon her,—that she was not strong enough to do without love when need was. She should have taught herself to be content with the shadow of her dream. Many never have more than that."

" Then you have no pity for her ? "

" Infinite pity, on the contrary. Weakness compels pity always,—but never admiration. Now let me recite the *Ulysses* to you. Then you must hear bits of *Locksley Hall*, and of *The Two Voices*, and some of the shorter lyrics — the *St. Agnes*, at least. You really must know Tennyson! "

So he went on from poem to poem, her eager

interest and quick apprehension inciting him to discuss each in turn with her. She surprised him by the originality of her ways of thought and the maturity of her literary judgments, to which the youthfulness of her enthusiasms and the unexpectedness of her ignorances were a piquant contrast, while he was conscious throughout of that unanimity of standard and principle between them that is the only basis for argument. And Agnes, as his fluent talk passed from one author to another, knew that she had never before met any one like this man. To his rare culture he added a delicacy of perception and lightness of touch that took all semblance of pedantry from his scholarly and pungent criticisms or brilliant analyses, lending sparkle and charm to whatever he said, and Agnes could not but feel proud of meeting such a mind on equal terms, while it was impossible to remain insensible to the magnetism of his personality. Such companionship shortened the walk marvellously for them both, since nothing so determines distance as the wayfarer's frame of mind, and before they realized it they found themselves at Old Oaks.

"Will you not come in?" she asked, as he paused at the gate.

He raised his hat.

"I am sorry to say no, but I must go back now."

Agnes held out her hand.

"At least let me thank you for your kindness in coming with me."

"That was a kindness which overpaid itself. Thank me, rather, for introducing you to Tennyson."

"Oh, as to that," Agnes exclaimed, extending her hand to him again, "I shall be grateful to you for that as long as I live. I shall never forget this walk." And then, ashamed of her impulsive action, she hurriedly drew away her hand and went on toward the house, with difficulty resisting some indefinable power that seemed compelling her to look back.

Not until she was in her own room after a brief narration of events to Mrs. Goodwin, who was so much concerned about the accident as to pay small attention to the concluding scant details, did it occur to Agnes that nothing had even now been said regarding any further meeting. Was, then, this second chance encounter to be their last? Of course not, she told herself confidently, as she flung off her broad-brimmed black hat with a laugh at her forgetfulness. They would inevitably meet again. What was to be, must be.

Slipping out of her silk gown, she hastily rearranged her hair, scarcely glancing into the mirror as she bound the rich locks into place, then donned a cool muslin, beguiling in simplicity and freshness, and knotted a long ribbon about her slender waist, her thoughts engrossed with the poems that David had repeated, together with his every comment. Her memory was as tenacious as her father's, and as stanza after stanza flashed back upon her recollection the blood bounded through her veins for pleasure. What a mine of wealth he had opened to her! What should she not owe him for ever!

She had barely put the finishing touch to her dainty toilet when Mrs. Goodwin's maid brought word that Dr. Godfrey Kilpatrick was below and would remain to dinner. Agnes awoke out of her trance with a start. In the preoccupation of the past week she had forgotten her last meeting with Godfrey. The thought of it was like a jarring note in a familiar strain. Her feeling toward him had undergone a curious elucidation of late. It was quite clear to her now that she should never care for him in the way he wished, and a dread came over her of that which he might still insist upon her hearing.

But when she went down she found him so entirely his old self and so full of gaiety and fun that, watching her father's and aunt's enjoyment of him, she chided herself for her selfish wish that he had stayed away. Mrs. Goodwin had a cold which kept her indoors, and they spent the evening in the book-room. This was a circular apartment with two enticing tower-rooms opening out of it, and with bookcases built around it from floor to ceiling, just space enough being left at the top for a shelf on which stood bronze or marble busts of noted writers. The glass entrance doors resembled those of the cases, so that when closed a casual glance showed no way in or out of the room, giving one a restful sense of being shut in with the books beyond reach of interruption. Agnes wished that Mr. Mulgrave might see the room. She was sure that it would please him. As she talked she kept glancing at the closely packed shelves in hopes that

Tennyson might be lurking among his elder and more honoured brothers. Pope was there, and Dryden, and Thomson, and Young, and even Akenside, all in a sumptuous attire bespeaking their high literary standing, all also in that immaculate unhandled freshness that is so poor a compliment to an author. But Tennyson was not there.

Godfrey finally noticed her wandering gaze.

"What do you want, Agnes? Can I excavate you anything?"

"I was looking for Tennyson," she replied reluctantly. "But I see he is not here."

Godfrey pulled a wry face.

"Tennyson? Poetry again? There is no use in my tackling it, Agnes. Poetry is a poison-ivy to my mental make-up."

"So it is to mine," said Mrs. Goodwin, with a sneeze sounding like the condemnation and execution in one of the subject. "'Hands off' is the only safeguard for you and me, Godfrey."

"Read Horace if you must have something modern," suggested Mr. Alden behind the covers of a well-worn volume. "From the aptness of him one would think he had been born yesterday. You will find him vastly better fun than any of your sing-song Tennysons."

"I agree with my father," Godfrey said, moving a screen the better to shade Mrs. Goodwin's eyes from the light. "There is no need for poetry in the world's economics. Nothing was ever said in it that could not be better said in prose."

"On the contrary, poetry is never translatable

into prose," Agnes answered, taking up the gauntlet with spirit. "It is poetry just because of an indefinable something impossible to express in another form. If you can express it as well in prose, it simply is not poetry."

"Oh, if you begin to call in unknown quantities —' indefinable somethings ' and so on—of course I can't argue with you," returned Godfrey, amiably, picking up an uncut magazine and beginning to open its pages with that instinct of usefulness which is so agreeable a trait in one's companions. "It is precisely on account of that vagueness and looseness of ideas that no one ever expects anything manly or commonsensical of a poet."

"O Godfrey!" Agnes protested. "Pater, how can you allow such a slander!"

"Hear the boy out, my dear," murmured Mr. Alden absently, without looking up. "I am not listening to him, and some one must."

"Of course I don't mean Homer and that crowd," Godfrey conceded politely. "Those old chaps had grit in them. They wrote of manly things in a manly way, and you don't have to turn their books upside down to get at the meaning. But the modern genus is pretty much built up out of what is left over from other people's brains. I knew several of the University fellows who were by way of being poets. Each one thought himself a laureate at least, and taken all in all they were the most imbecile set there."

"Do you think it quite fair to gauge an entire class of men by the worthlessness of a few college

acquaintances?" Agnes asked scornfully. "A true poet—a really great poet—" she broke off, abashed at the image evoked.

"Go on," said Mrs. Goodwin, examining the monogram on her handkerchief with languid interest. "Define the Dodo."

Agnes looked up suddenly, her eyes shining.

"Ancient or modern has nothing to do with it, of course," she said. "All true poets are ageless."

"You mean that they never grow bald?" Godfrey inquired with interest.

"To be a great poet is necessarily to be good — to be great — as a man, too," Agnes continued, ignoring the frivolous interruption. "He writes solely out of himself — solely out of what he feels and is. He gives the world not only his acts, as other men do, but his inmost thoughts for it to judge him by. We know him through and through — we know his soul — as we read him. He could not write so nobly unless he lived nobly, too."

She ended in trepidation. Could it fail to be as palpable to the others as to herself for whose name the pronoun stood? But Mrs. Goodwin was politely, though inefficiently, covering a yawn, and Godfrey was smiling with the aggravating condescension of superior worldly wisdom.

"How little you know life," he remarked in the most matter-of-fact tone. "Why, my dear Agnes, a man's character is never to be judged in the least by his works. The rattling best surgeon I know is a man who — well, never mind."

The girl's face changed.

" No, never mind," she said, leaving her seat petulantly. " I cannot talk with you about these things."

Godfrey threw down the magazine and followed her into the embrasure of a window.

" Why not ? " he asked, lifting an end of her long sash ribbon and drawing it lightly between his fingers. " I like you to talk about them, you know, even when you are a little off."

" I cannot," she answered helplessly. " We do not think alike. We do not feel alike. We do not reason from the same standpoint."

There was a perceptible pause.

" Don't be down on me, Agnes," Godfrey said then gently. " I am not tuned up to your pitch, I dare say, but I hope I ring true on vital points for all that. Come! I don't care for poetry and you don't care about surgery. Can't we each score a point off and be good friends still ? "

There was no holding out against Godfrey's persuasive smile.

" Of course we can," she replied, so swiftly appeased that his spirits went up with a rebound. All the same, the breach between them had widened past bridging over, and Agnes knew that it was so.

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT THIRD WAVE

. . . the great third wave
That never a swimmer shall cross or climb.
—SWINBURNE.

WHENEVER Mrs. Goodwin recovered from any indisposition she instantly proceeded to exert her newly regained strength to the point of its immediate demoralization and loss, thus keeping her health in a perpetual see-saw of ups and downs. Mr. Alden remonstrated with her upon each proposed imprudence with as much pertinacity as if protest had ever proved of avail; and afterward, when the customary retribution had overtaken her, he flung amiable " I-told-you-so's " at her in the cheerily compassionate spirit of the unparticipant. Agnes was not surprised, therefore, the first day that her aunt's influenza showed signs of abating, to come upon her at a wide-open window, with Mr. Alden, obstinately expostulatory, at her side.

" What a bright, clean afternoon it is! " Mrs. Goodwin exclaimed, sniffing the crisp air with ostentatious relish. " It looks as if the sky had just been washed in soapsuds. See the birds swarming across those magnolia branches. Is n't it like a

Japanese screen gone mad ? And look at those rosebuds! Everything is out but me. What am I doing shut up in jail ? Jefferson, order the horses, will you ? I must be driven to Ocean Beach this instant."

Mr. Alden intrepidly began his futile task of dissuading. It was a superb afternoon seen from the windows,—just the afternoon for artists. But there was a chill east wind blowing wholly in the interest of the doctors. In her present condition it was bound to give her double pneumonia inside of ten minutes.

But Mrs. Goodwin was at that high-water mark of good humour that characterized all her altercations with her brother-in-law.

" Nonsense, Jefferson ! I am egregiously well again."

" I am sorry to hear it, Jane. I have always observed that it makes you ill to get well. I should think your experience ——"

" Bother experience ! There is nothing on earth so hard to get and so utterly useless when gotten. I am going to Ocean Beach."

" Oh, if you prefer to be on Matt's list ——"

" My dear Jefferson, I shall not be on Dr. Kilpatrick's list, if only because I know of no negative enjoyment more positively delightful than the not having a doctor's bill to pay. Come, order the phaeton and drive me to my death yourself! "

Half an hour later the party was on its way, Agnes very dainty and trim in her white piqué, seated on the high front seat beside her father, and Mrs.

Goodwin, a mass of propitiatory shawls, in solitary and complacent state behind. The immediate effect upon that good lady of getting her own way was always invigorating, and she vowed that she felt better the instant the east wind struck her.

Their destination was a lonely beach six miles distant, of whose value as a seaside resort, fortunately for its pristine charm, the neighbouring city was as yet unaware. The way led through broken hills by a time-old Quaker burying-ground, where the low dots of headstones, uniform in size and namelessness, looked like scattered daisies in the grass, and where the drooping willows were the only mark of sorrow, making the bold shafts and flaunting monuments of a less modest cemetery a mile away seem indelicate by contrast.

On and on ran the road, past fields of yellow grain and forests of primeval growth, coming out at last upon a broad stretch of marshes of a green so fresh, so translucent, and so buoyant, that it seemed as if they had been that moment created. Then, here and there, threadbare spots flecked the splendour of the vivid emerald carpet; gradually it became frayed and ragged and like a worn-out thing; and at last there was no tiniest sprig of green anywhere, but only a great waste of sand piled up in drifts or packed into solid plains, white, wide, desolate, glittering, awful. It seemed the death of the world.

But now the salt smell of the sea filled the air. The atmosphere glowed with its crystalline sparkle, and each breath became a tonic taste of pungency. The noise of the surf beyond was as the booming

of monster guns. The horses tossed their heads and quickened their pace as the sand hardened beneath their hoofs. A little more and the last high drift was passed and the blue immensity lay revealed, the shore line bounded by a magnificent double row of breakers, with a broad sweep of beach sloping down like a floor of polished marble to where the foam of the great waves ran up it in creamy curves. Save for a couple of sea-gulls, skimming low across the water on wings that caught and flashed back the sunlight, there was not a sign of life. On the one side was a desert of white death and silence; on the other, a blue eternity.

Agnes stood up in her seat. Always at the first sight of that tremendous picture something seemed to catch at her throat and suffocate her.

"Let me get down," she said; "I want to be nearer it."

Mr. Alden indulgently reined up the horses, then drove slowly on along the beach. Agnes went close to the water and stood looking out toward the horizon,—a lonely white figure lost in the vastness of that ocean solitude unlike any other solitude of earth in that the spectator feels himself a part of it instead of an intruder upon it. Here, too, he recognizes his small human mysteries of futility, of loneliness, of waste, written out before his eyes in Nature's large and ennobling lines, and gradually learns to see all his fretting pettinesses of thought explained away in her universal and comprehending greatness.

To be soothed and broadened in one is a most

subtle mental elixir. Agnes felt it without analyzing it and suddenly stretched out her arms over the sea.

"I love you! Oh, I love you!" she cried softly into infinity.

And then, ashamed to be under the sway of so indeterminate an emotion and seeking an escape from it, she turned to follow the carriage.

As she did so it stopped, some one rose by its side out of the sand, and after exchanging a few words with its occupants came on toward her. She stood still as she recognized David Mulgrave in the approaching figure, her heart giving a single throb and then quieting down into an odd calm.

"I am prepared to dispute possession with you, Miss Alden," David said laughingly as he joined her. "I have come to fancy that this beach belongs exclusively to myself. All the times that I have walked out here I have never before met any one."

"Its solitariness is its charm," Agnes replied. "It seems the very soul of loneliness laid bare. It would spoil the place if people came."

"Is that a hint for me to leave you?"

She gave him one of her rare smiles for answer, and they remained side by side without speaking, watching the waves roll in. First a faint line of added blue defined itself far out at sea; then there was a long, lifted shadow as of a giant finger moving beneath the water; then something alive and resistless rushed tumultuously in upon the shore, gathering volume and force by the way. Then came a

mighty upheaval from end to end; an instant's breathless suspense and poise, with a glimpse under into a mysterious black profundity, and a glimpse above of a curling green crest edged with light; then a thundering crash — a wild churning of a foamy, milk-white mass amid tossed clouds of spray; then a sudden subsiding sweep up the sand; then a whisper dying along the beach; and then—nothing, save a wet empty space and a surprised sensation of loss. So over, and over, and over, and over. Another, and another, and another, each with the same splendour of promise and magnificence of performance, each leaving the same indescribable sense of desolation behind it.

The carriage was but a few rods away, yet again it seemed to Agnes, as it had seemed upon the tower, as if she and David were alone in a new universe. The silence grew oppressive to her at last. She turned to David impulsively.

"Say it for me, please! Put what I am feeling into words. It hurts me to be so dumb."

He looked at her with sympathetic intuition.

"Do you think I am not dumb, too? Do you suppose I feel only up to the scant measure of my speech? To me as to you my impotence fitly to express myself is little short of torture. I am ashamed to be so inadequate — so weak — a mouthpiece. Yet when I look at this——"

"Well? And then?" Agnes prompted, exultantly conscious that he was departing from his usual reticence in even so slight a confession. "And then?"

He drew a long breath.

"I can understand my failures here," he said. "This makes me know my limitations. We cripple ourselves by wasting effort or regret on the impossible. Few of us are giants. The most of us must be content with small tools and a small field. The only obligation laid upon us—but it is an imperative one—is that none should fall short of his best."

"Ah — when it is a real best!" said Agnes, wistfully. "But when one's utmost is so insignificant as to be worthless, there is no inspiration to live up to it."

"We cannot estimate the worth of any work until we have learned its results, can we?" David returned with a gentleness of intonation that was very winning. "Are we not all moles digging in the dark? But the value of the seemingly insignificant is one of Nature's great lessons. We must be patient."

"Are you always patient?" the girl asked, with a sudden glance up at him.

At the abrupt question David's face changed, and a sternness came into it as at some unwelcome memory.

"No, I am not," he answered. "I have to learn my lesson yet,—patience for beginnings that are to come to no endings; constant disappointments; countless small endurances that there is no glory in meeting and yet that must be met. There is no end to life's need of patience."

"I hate patience!" Agnes said rebelliously, throwing back her head with the gesture peculiar to

her. " It is a plebeian virtue, meant for the poor in spirit. It outrules discontent. And discontent stands for progress. Am I wrong ? "

David paused before answering and let his penetrating glance rest a moment upon her face, as if searching for the character lines underlying its rare beauty, and Agnes coloured faintly, although in the frankness of her attitude toward him she felt no embarrassment.

" Am I wrong ? " she repeated presently, but with less assurance than before.

David turned back to the ocean, looking off across its turbulence to the far-off point where heaven and earth were at one.

" To be patient is to be at peace," he said quietly, but with a note of impassioned longing in his voice. " And to be at peace is to be strong."

Something in his expression lent the words a fuller meaning. Agnes pondered over them, her gaze passing as his had beyond the turmoil to the distant calm. When she looked up at him again her face was grown very sweet.

" I understand. I was wrong," she said, and in the swift look of pleasure that he gave her, she felt the beginning of a new sympathy between them. It was as if a flower were opening before her.

" It is easy to fit oneself with an entire moral suit of philosophy. The difficulty is to wear the garment with grace," David observed after a while, shaking off his gravity and turning to her with his usual bright smile of fellowship. " I hope I have not bored you."

"You could not do that," Agnes replied quickly. "I like to be made to think, and thinking without a pilot is shipwreck. Already you have shown me many of my mistakes."

"If I have done so it was very rude of me," David said lightly.

"No, it was very kind of you," Agnes returned. "It is the first step toward my doing right."

"Is that your primary wish—to do right?" David inquired, and as she looked up questioningly he added: "You know the persons who want to do right are few in proportion to those who want to know what is the right thing to do."

Agnes laughed,—a young girlish laugh good to hear and that brought lovely lines into her face. Then she sobered down quite suddenly.

"I do not think I could know what was right, and not at least try to do it," she said.

David studied her again for a moment. Her eyes met his unflinchingly, clear, steadfast, and true. It was impossible to look down into her soul and not feel one's heart go out to her.

"You would try your best — always;— and succeed," he replied in a tone of great friendliness after that instant's scrutiny, and a thrill passed through her. It is good to be trusted. But the trust of some is an inspiration.

The carriage, meanwhile, had returned upon its tracks, and Mr. Alden drew up beside them.

"Climb in, Agnes," he said. "We must be going home. The east wind ——"

"East wind!" ejaculated Mrs. Goodwin, contemptuously. "If there is any east wind at all it is from the south. Will you let us drive you back, Mr. Mulgrave? I shall be grateful for your company. I am sick to death of holding my tongue. Do get in here!"

So Agnes mounted again to her father's side, and David, after a little urging, took the vacant place behind her. She could not see him, nor hear what passed between him and her aunt, for her father, exhilarated by the sea air, kept up a stream of gentle chatter with her all the way back. But she felt singularly happy. There was a sudden releasing and intensifying of all her senses, in comparison with which her placid past seemed an emotionless non-existence, void of thought, experience, or desire. Life was only just beginning. She saw and felt for the first time. She had taken as yet but a single step in a world rich with uncomprehended possibilities and beautiful beyond belief with vague, strange promises. Oh, it was good to be young — good to be strong — good, good, to be happy, she told herself over and over, with that confidence in the permanence of existing conditions that is youth's privilege.

It seemed to her that they had scarcely left Ocean Beach before they were at the great gate opening into Old Oaks from the rear. As Mr. Alden was driving in under the knotted boughs that made so wide and cool a shadow, Mrs. Goodwin called out to him to stop, emphasizing the command by an unceremonious dig with her parasol.

"Wait, Jefferson! Mr. Mulgrave would like to leave us here."

Agnes looked round blankly as David sprang from the carriage and stood with bared head to say farewell. She had taken it for granted that he would go with them to the house. Was this beautiful day not to be rounded out to its end? She ventured to suggest to her aunt that it was their dinner hour, and that perhaps Mr. Mulgrave could be persuaded to remain.

"Thank you very much," David answered, forestalling Mrs. Goodwin's cordial endorsement of the invitation. "But I must go home. I have been quite long away from my wife as it is. You have given me a delightful drive."

"Another time, then," said Mrs. Goodwin, affably. "You must dine with us soon, both of you. Meantime my niece will call upon Mrs. Mulgrave as I promised."

"It will be extremely kind of Miss Alden," David replied, with a pleased glance up at Agnes where she sat turned suddenly into stone. "I will tell my wife of the pleasure in store for her." And with another bow and smile he moved aside as Mr. Alden touched the horses lightly with the whip and they flew on to the house.

Agnes sat with her hands clenched tightly in her lap. Why had it never occurred to her that he might be married? Why did it matter that he was? What was this curious sensation that shot through her like a physical pain?

She had barely pulled herself together when they

were at the front door, and Mr. Alden was calling upon her to look at the sunset before alighting.

"Your poet should have seen this," he observed amiably. "You will have to get up a sunset for him, Jane, when he dines here. If he is anything of what he calls himself he will care vastly more for that than for Mason's best dinner. The wife, though, may prefer the dinner. By the way, I did not know there was a wife."

"Yes, you did," contradicted Mrs. Goodwin, calmly. "Don't you remember Dr. Kilpatrick's telling us that he was called to Fairfields to see a Mrs. Mulgrave, and that so he met the poet?"

"Oh, yes; oh, yes," assented Mr. Alden, abandoning the reins to a waiting groom. "That was the day Matt brought me the beetle's wing — a fine specimen it was, too. I forgot the wife. Not that it matters. It is the poetry that matters,— hey, Agnes?—and not the wife at all. What a sky that is!"

"The wife does matter in this case, as it happens," said Mrs. Goodwin, extricating herself adroitly from her swathing shawls, "for I promised Mr. Mulgrave that Agnes should call upon her. It seems they have lived six years in Fairfields — ever since their marriage, in fact. I extorted what I could of biography out of him on the way home, and really I never had so interesting a drive, though I don't know that I learned much more than that he is Professor of English Literature at the University. A charming man he is — a gentleman through and through. We must see a great deal of him. That need not oblige us to read his poetry."

Agnes listened in silence but with a frightened consciousness of a mad wave of rebellion surging all over her. What was it? Surely it did not matter in the least that David Mulgrave was married. It was only his poetry that mattered, as her father had said. She had his poetry still. She would have that always — that, and his friendship. No wife could take either from her.

There she became aware of an insane inclination to cry. But why should she want to cry? What on earth was there to cry about? She bit her lips hard and stared at the sunset with dilated, unseeing eyes. A figure entering the gate at that moment attracted her attention. Could it be David coming back to say that it was all some astonishing mistake —that there was no wife, and that he would stay to dinner?

She made an effort to collect her senses, looked more closely, and saw that it was Godfrey. A feeling of repulsion, almost of aversion, for him suddenly took possession of her. Turning sharply about, she fled indoors and up to her room and locked and bolted the door behind her.

"What does he come for? I hate him, oh, I *hate* him!" she cried aloud, stamping her foot. And then she flung herself face downward on the couch, pulling the cushions about her head on either side to stifle the sounds, and broke into a storm of sobs.

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CHAPTER VII

THE RIFT WITHIN THE LUTE

It is the little rift within the lute.

—TENNYSON.

DAVID started out briskly for Fairfields, but as he reached the Avenue of Elms the elasticity left his step, until, becoming aware of the change, he quickened his pace, and presently turned aside into a small secluded garden kept in the most dainty order and sweet with flowering trees and shrubs. Through these he passed to a picturesque cottage in the rear, so hidden behind cedar hedges and luxuriant maples as to be invisible from the road. In its retirement, simplicity, and charm it was an ideal home for a poet, and the wife who flew to meet him as he stepped upon the broad veranda seemed ideal too. She was somewhat below medium height, but so slenderly fashioned as to appear tall, and with a bird-like alertness of figure and poise that made her restless vivacity of movement natural and interesting, while her costume so perfectly suited her in its every detail that it seemed as much a part of her as their feathers do of the birds. Her beauty was that of complexion and colouring rather than of feature, but taken altogether she was so

extremely pretty as to be charming even now with a face stained with tears. She flung herself into her husband's arms and clung to him closely, both hands clasped about his neck, and her auburn head pressed against his breast.

"Forgive me, David dear! I am so sorry! *so* sorry! I will never act so again. I could n't help it to-day. Do say you forgive me! Kiss me, David, and say you forgive me! Say it quick! Oh, I do love you so! I can't live another minute unless you forgive me and love me again just as you used to!"

The words poured out in impetuous dashes, all penitence and despair.

David unclasped her fragile arms and held her off a little that he might look down into her face.

"Is it my forgiveness that you want, Isabel, or my love?"

"Both — both!" she said, big tears streaming over her soft cheeks. "I know I don't deserve it — not one bit — but you have always been so generous, so lovely, so patient with me. Be patient only this once more, David!"

"Only this once more?" he asked, with a faint, sad smile. "Not again to-morrow and next day?"

"Oh, how can you be so hard with me when you see how sorry I am?" Isabel cried. "Why won't you have faith in me? Whether you believe me or not I will prove to you this time that I mean what I say. I am going to be an entirely different woman from to-day."

" Only be all that you can be, dear. I could wish nothing more than that."

" I will—I will! " she promised eagerly. " You don't know how I hate myself for the way I have behaved, and how I long to be all that you used to think I was. I know I disappointed you dreadfully. You supposed I was like yourself — every feeling I had kept under iron chains. But I married you because I wanted to be strong and good as you are, and I knew you would help me to grow to my best self. You believe that of me at least, David, don't you ?—that I have a best self and that I want to grow up to it ? "

" Yes, Isabel. I do believe that. If I did not I should have no hope left."

" Do you know that you have n't kissed me yet ? " Isabel declared suddenly, coming nearer to him. " How can I know you have forgiven me until you kiss me ? "

She held up her face winningly and David stooped and kissed her forehead gravely.

" No, not that way! " she said with alluring pettishness. " Kiss me as if you loved me. You do love me, don't you, David ? Just as much as ever ? "

David took her two small hands in his, almost crushing them in his strong grasp.

" Isabel," he said earnestly, " be your true self —the real self that I saw and loved in you at first, that I still believe in, still hope in. Live up to your own aspirations, or try to—only let me see that you are really trying. Rise above these foolish

tempers and jealousies and exactions that are so unworthy of us both. Our life together might have been a heaven, and you have made it — you know yourself what needless misery you insist upon bringing into it, all that you make us both suffer. I could be more patient if you had n't it in you to be different. I should have to bear with it then. But to know that back of it all you are a high-minded, high-principled woman, and to see you wilfully warping your own character, blunting your own standards, wilfully deteriorating, all because it is easier to yield to the moment's impulse than to take a brave stand against it,—that is what it is so hard to forgive. I cannot endure to see you fall so short of what you might be."

Isabel's head had drooped low.

"I do not wonder you feel so," she replied humbly. "I have tried you beyond any other man's endurance. But I have not lowered my standards, David. You wrong me there. And I mean to rise to them yet. You don't know how you help me— what a constant inspiration you are to me. And this day is to be the turning-point in my life. The moment you went off this afternoon I realized how hateful I had been. I thought it all out while you were away. You were gone so long! But I knew it was all my fault. I had driven you off by making Hidaway, that should be so happy and peaceful, only a place for you to want to escape from. Oh, I cried so! You would have been sorry for me if you had seen how I cried. And I determined it should never be so again, David — never. I don't

blame you for not believing in me, but I *am* strong enough to conquer myself, and I *will*."

She set her thin lips sternly together, and such a look of resolve came into her face that David could not but draw hope from it once more. He put his arm about her protectingly.

" Dear little wife," he said, in tones that made the words music to her, " I believe that you will conquer in the end. I know it must be a hard struggle, but nothing worth having was ever had for nothing. We will fight it through together, you helping me, I helping you. Let us not either of us lose courage again."

And there Isabel threw herself upon his neck in a torrent of self-accusing tears, and had to be soothed and comforted like a child.

Later they went in to their delayed dinner, Isabel in a chastened yet exalted mood of contrition which called forth all that was most attractive in her. She was eager to please and to be pleased, full of unfeigned, unselfish interest, sympathetic, winsome, fascinating. And David, lured from his gravity in prompt response, seemed no longer the man of an hour before, but became full of entertaining anecdote and crisp talk, answering her gay speech with sparkling rejoinder and meeting her every suggested thought half way with an intuition that was as stimulating to her as her vivacity was to him. She cast many an admiring glance at him across the table, and when the maid had left them to themselves with the coffee, she told him very sweetly and plaintively how lonely the afternoon had been

without him, asking affectionately where he had spent it. At his answer that he had been to Ocean Beach, her blue eyes filled with ready tears.

"That dreary place! You always go there when you are unhappy," she said remorsefully. "I hate the very name of it now. It is your refuge whenever you want to get to the end of the earth, out of reach of Hidaway and everybody."

"I did not get away from everybody this time," David replied lightly. And then he told her of his meeting the Aldens, and of his drive back with them and Mrs. Goodwin's promise that her niece should call.

Isabel was interested at once and plied David with a host of impetuous questions.

"What does Miss Alden look like?" she finally asked. "You have never described her, and I got nothing out of dear old Dr. Kilpatrick except some nonsense to the effect that she was made of mother-of-pearl and moonshine and gold-leaf. Evidently he idolizes her. Is she pretty?"

"Pretty?" David repeated reflectively. "That does not seem the right word for her. She has character and strength in her face. One could rely on her."

Isabel's brow contracted.

"Strength and reliability. Exactly the characteristics that I lack — that you think I lack," she amended reproachfully, pouring herself out a second cup of black coffee; "though truly, considering that you have seen Miss Alden only three times in all, I don't see how you can decide so positively as to her virtues."

"I do not," David answered quietly. "I only surmise them."

"Well, I shall know the moment I see her," Isabel resumed, her brow clearing with the recollection of the promised visit. "A woman always reads another woman at sight. I wonder if she will like me. Has she asked anything about me?"

"No. Our talks have been purely impersonal. But Dr. Kilpatrick doubtless told her anything she wanted to know. He must have mentioned your neuralgia, for Mrs. Goodwin asked about it, and recommended east winds in double doses as a cure. She had tried them with flagrant success, she said."

Isabel laughed and pushed away her cup.

"I don't want any more coffee after all. Let us go out on the veranda. Oh, have you not finished? I will wait for you there then. It is too hot in here. I shall suffocate if I stay another minute."

She jumped up, giving him a swift caress as she passed, and left the room, pausing on the threshold —a charming girlish picture framed by the doorway — to flash back a smile and bid him follow quickly, for she could not spare him long.

But it was not to finish his coffee that David remained behind. When Isabel had gone he set down his untasted cup and sat with both elbows on the table and his head sunk in his hands. Strength and reliability. Yes, the two qualities that his poor little wife lacked. Could he ever teach them to her? Would life itself ever teach them to her? Or were all the days of all their future to be like this one?

There was indeed a need of patience.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN HALF-GODS GO

> Heartily know,
> When half-gods go,
> The gods arrive.
>
> —EMERSON.

IT was long before Agnes could bring herself to go down-stairs. She wanted beyond anything to be alone and to think out what this surprising thing was that had happened to her. Why should she hate Godfrey? Why should she resent David's marriage? Why should she feel an antagonism toward a woman she had never seen?

For the first time she realized that she did not know herself, and that she was possessed by emotions as foreign to her nature, as she had hitherto understood it, as if they belonged to another. It frightened her. Was she nothing but a ball, to be tossed about at will by life's great passions, a prey to whatever elementary feelings were in her? She was like one awakening in chaos out of a lifetime's dream of peace.

In the wish to postpone a meeting with Godfrey she lingered so long over her toilet that dinner had been announced full ten minutes before she

made her appearance in the book-room, and Mrs. Goodwin was perceptibly in an ill humour over the delay, greeting the charming apparition with a shooting out of the under lip that made her face quite hideous.

"We could have spared a few of the furbelows for sake of the soup, my dear," she said tartly.

But Godfrey came gallantly to the rescue.

"What scandalous taste, dear Mrs. Goodwin!" he exclaimed, looking at Agnes with open admiration. "Who would not forego dinner altogether for the pleasure of seeing Agnes in that gown!"

"Idiot!" ejaculated Mrs. Goodwin. "You would be as ready to starve for a five-cent print. Give me your arm and take me in at once. Jackson will be out of his mind thinking of the fish."

"He does n't look as if he would have far to go to get out of it," observed Godfrey, maliciously, and Mrs. Goodwin immediately fell into the trap by laughing herself back into good temper.

Agnes was silent through the dinner. The glance accompanying Godfrey's speech made her feel that she was on the verge of a volcano which at any moment might engulf her in an overflow of burning lava. But after that instant of self-betrayal Godfrey paid no attention to her, devoting himself to fun-making with the elders, until by degrees, as the evening wore on in its usual light-hearted fashion, she forgot her dread.

It was one of those matchless June nights whose beauty haunts the memory, and later Mr. Alden, Godfrey, and she went for a walk around the

grounds in the perfumed coolness of the twilight. As they passed one of the graperies Mr. Alden unexpectedly deserted them for a colloquy with the head gardener, and she found herself walking on alone with Godfrey.

"Do you know that you look lovely to-night?" he began. "You should always wear white if I had my say. Agnes — I see you so seldom alone that I must take my chance when it comes. Let me tell you now—"

"No, no!" she broke in, her heart leaping to her throat with fear of what was coming. "Not now — not ever! Let us go back to Pater."

She turned to retrace her steps, but the movement only brought her face to face with Godfrey, who quietly placed himself in her path.

"Dear," he said, with a new and gentle dignity that sat well on him, "I think you will have to listen to me now. I simply can't keep it in any longer. I have got to tell you that I love you. I have loved you for I don't know how long. I can't tell you when it began. I only know that it is never going to end."

"I — I don't want it to end — our friendship, I mean," faltered Agnes, vainly endeavouring to read a lesser meaning into his words. "We are such good friends, Godfrey."

"We are not friends at all," blurted out the young fellow. "I love you, and love is as much more than friendship as heaven is higher than earth. Everything else is nothing compared with it. You may have dozens of friends, but you can love only

one out of all the world—only one, and that one as long as you live, and with all your heart and soul and the very best of everything that is in you. That is the way I feel toward you, Agnes,—that is what I am offering you,—don't you understand? Not friendship. Not a boy's liking. But love,—a man's love,—the love of all my life to come!"

At the words everything grew plain to Agnes as if a veil had been torn away. She saw clearly into her own heart and recognized with terror that love was there indeed,—the love of one only and the love of that one for ever,—but not the love of Godfrey. It seemed to her as if years of time had swept over her head in the shock of the discovery, and she had stepped out of her happy past for ever into womanhood's full heritage of suffering. She recoiled as before an actual vision of pain.

"Oh, I can't bear it!" she gasped, putting out her hands blindly. "I can't bear it!"

Her distress was so sudden and so acute that it startled Godfrey. He took her hands in his gently, and, her fear of him vanishing in her greater fear of herself, she let him hold them, scarcely knowing that he did so.

"Agnes, darling," he said very tenderly, "love is nothing to frighten you like this. Love is the most beautiful thing that there is. To love as I love you is not to be afraid of anything any more; it is to be strong as a lion for everything that may come. Why, there is nothing in all this world that I could not be, or could not do, for your sake, only because I love you."

Agnes recovered herself with a violent effort. She was trembling from head to foot, yet to her, too, some new dignity was come. She drew her hands from his and sorrow for the pain she must give him seized her.

"Dear Godfrey," she said, and the mere sound of her voice, with its pity and a something besides that belonged only to maturity and experience, put her instantly leagues away from him, "love *is* the most beautiful thing on earth. But it does not always bring joy. Perhaps it brings strength. I do not know. But this time it is to bring us both pain. I do not love you. I never shall."

The absolute quiet of her manner now as she turned to walk on was as unexpected to him as her extreme agitation had been before.

"Agnes!" he exclaimed in bewilderment, "you can't mean what you are saying! We have always been so much to each other. Love must have grown out of it for you as for me."

"No, Godfrey. You are a dear friend, the dearest I have; but no more."

"You call it friendship because you do not know the difference yet," he urged. "You cannot distinguish it from love."

A deep flush mounted to her forehead, though in the gathering darkness he could not see it.

"I do know the difference," she returned, with a calm that was the annihilation of his hope. "It is impossible to mistake love for friendship. I shall be your friend always, but I shall never love you."

"Don't say never!" Godfrey entreated passionately. "Say not yet. I will wait. By and by—"

"No, Godfrey. Never."

"Don't," he cried out sharply. But she went on relentlessly:

"No. Never. Never."

There was a silence in which all the little blithe noises of the night were distinctly audible. Godfrey swallowed something in his throat. When he began again his voice was thick and choked.

"You think, perhaps, that a rollicking fellow like me is not capable of deep feelings. I am not worthy of you, of course. But my love for you has grown out of the very best that is in me — like my faith in God and the things like that — the things that a man keeps to himself. I don't know how to tell you of it. Some fellows could talk about it in a way to make you understand all that it meant to them; but I can't. I can make jokes fast enough, but when it comes to what lies deep down I can't speak of it. I can only feel it. And I have been feeling it since I can't say when. Loving you is as much a part of my life as breathing. It has been a joy to love you—like the joy of living. But now — now it hurts — hurts worse because I can't say how much."

There he stopped, dismayed, perceiving that Agnes was crying softly.

"What a brute I am!" he exclaimed contritely. "I have no right to harrow you up so! I will not speak of this again, Agnes, not for ever so long. But you must understand that I shall never give

you up. I could no more give you up than I could stop loving you. You will not refuse to receive me on the old footing, though, will you ? I may come just the same ? — you will let me, Agnes ? "

Through the dusk he felt rather than saw how true and womanly was the look on her face as she turned it toward him.

" Not if it means that you still hope," she answered gravely. " You think I do not know my own mind yet, but I do. I know it as positively as you know yours. Nothing can ever change it."

Their slow walk had brought them within sight of the house and of Mrs. Goodwin on the terrace, where by this time Mr. Alden had joined her. Godfrey drew back within the shadow of the trees and caught Agnes by the hand.

" Wait a moment, Agnes. I can't go on with you. I can't joke with them to-night. I will say good-bye here."

So they stood looking at each other through the gloom with pale pained faces, two unhappy young things for whom the first drop of bitterness in their cup had turned all the wine of life into gall.

" I shall come again soon," Godfrey resumed presently. " And when I come you will think I have forgotten. But I shall never forget — never, Agnes, and I shall *never* give you up. Good-night — *darling !* And God bless you ! "

He lifted her hand with an awkward, unaccustomed movement, kissed it, let it fall and walked rapidly away.

Agnes waited till she heard the gate click to behind him like a signet set upon their finished happy comradeship. Then with slow steps she mounted the hill to the terrace. Mr. Alden sat there looking contentedly up at the sky, naming aloud the stars in friendly and familiar fashion, or quoting bits of Anacreon to Mrs. Goodwin, who yawned ostentatiously from time to time by way of letting him know that she heard him. When Agnes appeared her aunt hailed her impatiently.

"Pray hurry, child! I am worn out with your father. He has another Greek attack." Then she detected the trouble on the girl's face. "Why, what is wrong? And what have you done with Godfrey?" she added in surprise.

Agnes murmured an inarticulate evasion, and Mrs. Goodwin hastily put on her glasses, focussing upon her niece a look of such formidably assisted intelligence that further answer seemed unnecessary.

"What has upset you? And why has Godfrey gone without bidding us good-night?"

Agnes paused by Mr. Alden's side and reached down for his hand, instinctively turning to the next nearest love for comfort in default of the mother-love that no soul ever outgrows the need of, even when it has not known by blessed experience all that that dear love can actually be.

"I never saw you look so disturbed," continued Mrs. Goodwin, staring at Agnes with her uncompromising double vision. "What has happened?"

"I hurt Godfrey, and it hurt me to do it," Agnes replied at last reluctantly.

"Hurt Godfrey?" echoed her aunt, incredulously. "How could you hurt him? Agnes, I insist upon knowing what has taken place."

Curiosity, backed by authority, can carry any fortress, however ably defended. Agnes surrendered helplessly.

"Godfrey wants me to care for him, and I cannot," she said under her breath, the colour going in a hot wave over her face. "That is all."

Mr. Alden's hand closed over his daughter's in a clasp that was like the most tenderly spoken sympathy, though he gave no other sign that he heard. Mrs. Goodwin sat bolt upright in her chair as if she had received an electric shock.

"All!" she cried. "And you have sent the poor boy off under the impression that you meant it?"

"I mean it, Aunt Jane."

"You don't mean that you intend to refuse him —to refuse *Godfrey?*"

"I can never marry him, Aunt Jane."

Mrs. Goodwin was silent a moment from astonishment. Then she took off her glasses with elaborate deliberation, and, getting up with the solemnity attaching to all stiff-jointed movements, went to where the girl stood by her father and sat down on her other side.

"My dear," she began with unusual gentleness, "it is a question, of course, for no one but yourself to decide. Still let me point out a single significant fact. In the sum total of your acquaintances there is precisely one man worthy of being named in the

same breath with Godfrey Kilpatrick, and that is Godfrey Kilpatrick himself. Subtract Godfrey, and there is only a residue of ciphers. Jefferson,"—she turned suddenly to Mr. Alden, and her voice softened into real feeling,—"do not let this child throw away unthinkingly the surest chance of happiness that Fate can ever offer her!"

"Agnes knows my opinion of Godfrey," Mr. Alden answered, affectionately stroking his daughter's hand. "I have not a thing against Godfrey, not a thing—except his mother. But Agnes knows her own heart, Jane."

"Oh, as to her heart," declared Mrs. Goodwin, screwing up her lips, "do pray leave her heart to its proper duty of regulating her circulation. Why should a pump be called upon to settle the marriage question? It could only throw cold water on it in any case. Common-sense is the adviser for Agnes now. She needs time to familiarize herself with the idea of Godfrey in this new rôle. Let her have time. No girl could help loving Godfrey in the end."

Agnes stood very straight and still between the two, looking away from them both. She had thrown back her head and a faint smile that was neither mirth nor derision was playing round her mouth. Something, Mrs. Goodwin could not tell what, made the older woman realize vaguely that this was not at all the Agnes of yesterday. The girl moved slightly as her aunt ceased speaking.

"Dear Aunt Jane," she said gently, "in some things Time teaches more in a moment than in

years. I know that I can never marry Godfrey. I know that I shall never marry at all."

"How young that is,—to think that one's first negative includes the rejection of the entire male creation!" Mrs. Goodwin observed airily, though with palpable discontent, conscious of something singularly disconcerting in this atmosphere of maturity about her niece. "Come, my dear. Have you no definite reasons—nothing more to say?"

Agnes drew back a little.

"Only good-night," she answered quietly. "I will go to my room now. Good-night, Pater."

She stooped and kissed her father, and in the fleeting glimpse he had of her face as she turned away, he saw that despite the smile her eyes were wet.

"Well," said Mrs. Goodwin, pettishly, returning to her easy-chair with the feeling that in leaving it she had made an unappreciated sacrifice; "I must say that if the only effect of a classical upbringing is to lead girls to throw over men like Godfrey, for Heaven's sake give me plain English and no grammar at all next time. Agnes is flinging away the opportunity of her life."

"Leave the child to herself," Mr. Alden replied, following the movements of a firefly with exasperating equanimity. "Greek and Latin have at least taught her to know what she wants." And Mrs. Goodwin relapsed into the perverse gloom of unconvinced acquiescence.

Several hours later, on his way to his apartment,

Mr. Alden saw a light under the door of his daughter's sitting-room and entered without knocking. Agnes was standing at the window, her hands clasped behind her back, in a rigidity of attitude betokening long tension and with a look of holding some strong emotion under inexorable subjection.

"It is very late, I know, my love," Mr. Alden said apologetically. "But seeing that you were still up I thought I would ask for another good-night kiss."

Her arms were about his neck on the instant, and to her dismay the tears that she had been crushing back masterfully came in an uncontrollable burst. Her father held her close and let her cry for a time unchecked. Then he fondly patted her head as if she were a child.

"There, dear, there! Don't take poor Godfrey's trouble so to heart. Be glad for me. His loss is my gain,—for the present, at least."

"For always," Agnes corrected him, smiling at him through her tears. "I will never leave you,—never, dear old Pater!"

"So all young girls think until Prince Charming comes," said Mr. Alden, with a sage shake of the head. "It will be with my Agnes as with the rest. If not Godfrey, then some other by and by."

"No, Pater! No, Pater!" Agnes assured him earnestly. "I have seen a vision to-night of all my future, and there is to be no marriage in it for me ever. There could not be. I cannot explain it, but I know what I know. It is to be just you and me for always, Pater,—nobody else ever. Are

you not glad, dear? Do you not want to keep me?"

"*Glad!*" Mr. Alden answered, folding her to his heart. "I am only a poor selfish old dog, I know, my dear. But to give you up to any one — even to Godfrey — would be to lose the sun out of Heaven."

CHAPTER IX

LIFE IN A NEW RHYTHM

. . . the whole
Of life in a new rhythm.
— E. B. BROWNING.

MRS. GOODWIN was one of those always interesting persons who live absorbingly in the present, her latest interest engrossing her to the entire exclusion of whatever had previously monopolized her. So now her concern at Godfrey's rejection readily eclipsed her dawning interest in David Mulgrave. She had not once mentioned his name since the drive, still less remembered her impulsive promise that Agnes should call upon his wife. It was going to be an easy matter, therefore, Agnes fancied, to put him out of her life, just as she had thrust his poems out of reach on the highest shelf in the book-room.

But forgetfulness was not so lightly accomplished, and to her dismay line after line of the poems kept recurring to her mind, turning her suddenly pale as if his remembered words brought his embodied presence with them. They were all noble lines and hauntingly beautiful. It was an almost invincible temptation to try how far she could repeat in their entirety the poems that contained them. But re-

membrance was poisonous, whatever insidious shape it assumed, and she set herself inflexibly against its slightest indulgence. Yet a week later, chancing upon a notice of David's volume in one of the best journals of the day, she seized it and read it through in a flash, hungrily and excitedly. Ah, she had not been mistaken! The critics agreed with her. The critics recognized him. Soon all the world would know him for what he was.

She tossed back her head, smiling radiantly. Then her face darkened, and crumpling the paper together she thrust it into a waste-basket, pushing it down with fierce energy. What should his reputation matter to her?

"What have you there? What are you doing?" asked Mrs. Goodwin, indolently, roused by the crackling of the sheet. "Another June-bug?"

"It is only an old *Post*," Agnes answered with assumed indifference. "It should have been thrown away before."

It was her first attempt at hiding her feelings, and it pained her singularly. She had never had any thought to conceal before. Her life had flowed on like a limpid stream, transparent at every point to whatever glance fell upon it. Was that brief storm of a single day so to trouble it in all its length that even in its shallows it could never run clear again?

Mrs. Goodwin watched her covertly, amused and speculative. How long would it take the child to realize that she had given Godfrey the wrong answer? Agnes read her aunt's mind perfectly, with

that curious perspicacity regarding the thoughts of others that frequently accompanies the power of concealing one's own. Poor Godfrey! So his hurt was to serve her as a protection from the inquisitiveness of an affection which might else blunder on the truth. How incomprehensible that she could suddenly be so completely misinterpreted by those who knew her the best! Ah, what a slender tie holds souls in touch, and how easily is it severed!

She went to the open window to avoid her aunt's curious eyes, and stood looking out at the wide landscape, feeling that vague relief in mere physical space that comes when the spirit has been too long shut in with itself. Mrs. Goodwin, meanwhile, for lack of occupation, idly drew the discarded newspaper from the basket, and smoothing it out upon her knee caught sight of David's name. Instantly she was reminded of her promise.

"Agnes," she called cheerily, "before I forget again, order the carriage, will you, and go at once to call on that young Mrs. Mulgrave. I meant to send you early in the week, but, dear me, time flies so! It is always Friday or Saturday."

Agnes felt herself stiffen. She did not turn when her aunt spoke, but remained at the window offering one excuse after another. The day was too hot. It looked like a thunder-storm. Some of the horses were ailing. There was a book she especially wished to finish.

Mrs. Goodwin laid down the paper and looked at her.

"Why don't you say that you do not want to

go ?" she asked bluntly. "Excuses are not griddle cakes. The bottom one is always the best."

"Very well, then," Agnes answered, turning round slowly. "It is true. I do not care to go."

"Why not ? Don't you like feminine rhymes as well as masculine ones ?"

Agnes hesitated.

"I do not like calling upon total strangers," she answered unwillingly, the evasion seeming almost a lie to her young rigidity of conscience.

"That is an objection that will remove itself with your first call," Mrs. Goodwin returned calmly. "Now, my dear, give the order at once."

A feeling of fatality took possession of Agnes. Why struggle against the inevitable ? What must be, must. It was Kismet.

So she drove out into the late June sunlight, the carriage passing on moss-muffled wheels down the lonely lane through which she and David had walked a fortnight before with Tennyson as an invisible third. The whole way was one melodious memory, about which the enchantment of that day still lingered. The sunlight was a golden song flashed at her through the trees. The breeze in the boughs was a whispered lyric. The very atmosphere thrilled and glowed with poetry, delicious lines and perfect phrases pulsing about her as she passed. Once more she looked down the dim distance and saw Camelot in its magical and dangerous beauty. Once more she saw the far-off grace of Launcelot's waving plume. And again the lovely Lady of Shalott sang her last immortally sweet song of

surrender and of death, and an indefinable pathos made all the way misty as if seen through tears. What was it that David had said of the Lady of Shalott ? that it was her weakness, not her love, that was her doom ? and that weakness was a subject for pity only ? For pity. For condemnation. But surely no one could be weak who was determined to be strong. The Lady of Shalott need not have looked down to Camelot, and the curse would have been stayed for ever. Agnes straightened herself suddenly in her seat, and the vision of the knight and of the city faded.

The afternoon shadows were aslant by the time the carriage stopped before the gates of Hidaway. Agnes crossed the garden to the vine-covered cottage with a light swift step, her heart beating more quickly than its wont, and mounting the steps to the veranda came to a sudden pause. At the farther end where the clambering vines grew closest, Isabel lay asleep in a hammock, a small hand hanging over the side and an open book lying just under. Agnes caught her breath as she looked. The pale-green gown of the sleeper enfolded her in cool, transparent lines; she lay upon a mass of cushions the colour of moss in the rain, and the light, filtering through the summer leaves, cast a soft emerald dazzle all about her. She was like a jewel shimmering at the heart of a green grotto.

Agnes moved a little nearer, surprised and fascinated. At the rustle of her silken skirts Isabel awakened, and lifting her languid lids glanced up with sleepy blue eyes, then looked again inquiringly

and instantly sprang to her feet, her face breaking into an eager smile.

" I am sure you must be Miss Alden," she said, extending her hand with winning cordiality. " Indeed I know you from Dr. Kilpatrick's description. Besides, my husband said that you were coming. I am so glad to see you! "

She drew forward a low wicker chair for her guest and poised herself crosswise upon the hammock like a bird upon a bough, and the two were soon in as easy talk as if they had known each other for a lifetime. Formality was never long possible with Isabel.

" You are delightful," she said presently with flattering frankness. " I hope I shall see a great deal of you. I need you dreadfully. There are no young people in Fairfields, you know. Everybody is contemporary with the old mahogany sideboards and secretaries, and quite as ponderous, and being a bit of Chippendale I don't fit in with them. I have books to be sure, but even books get tiresome after awhile. I hate monologists."

She scowled, and pushing the floor with a delicately slippered foot set her unstable perch swinging, steadying herself with a hand stretched out on either side.

" What were you reading when I came ? " Agnes asked, glancing at the fallen volume. " It could not have been so very absorbing as it put you to sleep."

" That is the fault of the heat and of the loneliness," Isabel answered, stooping for the book with

a quick motion. " I can't read long by myself. I like books that make me think, but I must talk them over with some one or they are of no good to me. This is Emerson. David and I have been re-reading him. Is n't he inspiring ? He always makes me feel that I have it in me to be everything. Does he make you feel so, too ? "

" I don't know Emerson," Agnes answered, feeling appallingly ignorant. " I have read none of the new philosophers. My father says Plato is more modern than any of them, so he gave me no later one. You see how poorly read I am. You will get talked out with me directly."

" Indeed I never shall," Isabel asserted. " We are going to be friends—you and I. I don't know when I have felt so sure of anything. Don't say you will not be my friend ! You must be ! We can have such beautiful talks, and we can read and study together if you like. Shall we ? I am sure you care for books."

A charming light came into the younger girl's face.

" I do ! But I know so few—only those by the old writers and just one or two modern ones, such as Chaucer — I love Chaucer's quaintness — and Shakespeare, of course."

Isabel looked at her with admiring interest.

" So you call Chaucer modern, you antiquarian! Well, certainly the old writers are the backbone of modern literature,—David is always telling me so. But the modern ones seem nearer my needs, just as you seem nearer to me than any of the Fairfields

fossils. You are going to do me worlds of good, you are so serious and earnest. You are going to remake me into your likeness. I am a chameleon, you see. I take the colour of whatever I am near."

Thus she chattered on, with ceaseless birdlike movements of her pretty head, her bright eyes glancing hither and thither, while Agnes sat motionless, her hands clasped in her lap, not a fold of her white gown stirring, her eyes resting on the other's face. They were two absolutely opposite individualities, and to the casual observer the few years' difference in their ages would have seemed to be in favour of Isabel rather than of Agnes, so much deeper was the gravity and thoughtfulness of the latter's expression, and so much more marked her reserve and self-control. But, as often happens, their attraction for each other was in proportion to their unlikeness, and Agnes inwardly marvelled that at this first meeting she should find herself charmed into such unusual liking.

"Oh, you are a dear!" Isabel exclaimed impulsively, as Agnes was taking leave and stood on the veranda steps, t ll and slim as a white flower, while Isabel hovered a step above her, dainty and small, like a humming-bird in plumage of apple-green. "I have never come to care so quickly for any one. I shall return your call very soon, may I? very soon indeed? And *please*—" she put out both hands coaxingly—"won't you kiss me before you go? Oh, *do!*"

Agnes was not used to such swift intimacies of caress. She coloured faintly, and hesitatingly

lifting her head met Isabel's kiss with shy, soft lips. Then partly embarrassed, partly pleased, she passed down out of sight between the spreading syringa bushes and weigelia shrubs, and re-entering the carriage was driven away, her heart beating even more quickly than when she came. At least, however, the visit had been paid, and David and she had not met.

CHAPTER X

THE DARK BRINGS FORTH LIGHT

Where the dark brings forth light as a flower.
— SWINBURNE.

ISABEL kept her word. But a few days elapsed before she called at Old Oaks in the most becoming of all her becoming gowns, and in her brightest and most winning mood. Mrs. Goodwin was charmed with her artistic prettiness, her vivacity and impetuosity, her quick intelligence, and, above all, with her enthusiastic appreciation of Agnes, to which, when the latter left the room for a moment, she gave exuberant expression.

"I never met any one like her in all my life— *never!*" she said to Mrs. Goodwin, with the emphatic earnestness that constituted a part of her attraction, making whatever she said sound new and convincing. "She is unique."

"Yes, our Agnes is an unusual child — very dear and good," the aunt answered, with that inflection of voice that, like the raised bâton of the conductor, is the signal for the chorus to proceed.

"*Good!*" echoed Isabel. "The instant I saw her I knew that she never failed of the highest ideals, and never since I was born have I so wanted

anybody for a friend. Dear Mrs. Goodwin, do you believe she will be willing to be my friend? We talked about everything under heaven the other day, and almost all our ideas were in common. To feel alike in essentials is the best foundation for friendship,—don't you think so? I have thought about her ever since. Do you believe I can make her care for me?"

The blue eyes were so beseeching and the vibrant voice so coaxing that she was instantly reassured on that point, and she continued to ingratiate herself to such a degree with her hostess throughout the remainder of her call that, at its close, Mrs. Goodwin, who was as impulsive in her way as Isabel, cordially kissed her good-bye.

"That means that you like me a little and that I may come again, does it not?" Isabel exclaimed. "Please say that it does!"

"Of course it does," replied Mrs. Goodwin heartily. "Come as often as you like, my dear. And, by the way, day after to-morrow is the Fourth of July, and some of our friends, who want to escape the racket in town, are coming to us for the day. Will not you and Mr. Mulgrave join us? You must come early—say about eleven o'clock. I think you might enjoy it, and the view of the fireworks from the tower in the evening is really worth seeing. Will you come—both of you?"

Agnes was too much taken aback at this largess of hospitality to comparative strangers, and too much startled by the delight that flashed through her as she heard the invitation given, to command

her voice to second it. But Isabel required no urging, accepting so appreciatively and gracefully that Mrs. Goodwin was more than ever pleased with her.

"What a charming friend for you, Agnes!" she commented after Isabel had gone. "Really, it was an inspiration my asking her for the Fourth. She will be the life of the party. Besides, it will make it easier for you — Godfrey's coming, I mean — if outsiders are here."

"It was not necessary to invite the Mulgraves for that reason. Clara is coming, you know, and Jennie Van Buren and George and Theodore Hart. The Kilpatricks will not be here *en famille* in any case," Agnes answered, offering her useless protest for conscience' sake.

"Never mind. I really asked the Mulgraves for the one only sufficing reason in the world—because I wanted to," Mrs. Goodwin stated conclusively. "She is worth a dozen of your pointless, unexaggerating Claras and Jennies, and I take it he can teach a thing or two even to those intellectual flibbertigibbets the Harts."

"Godfrey, I suppose, has nothing to learn from any one," Agnes suggested, with an agitated little laugh which fell on Mrs. Goodwin's mistaken ears as a good omen.

"Oh, if you want an estimate of Godfrey," she said briskly, "you know you have only to ask Clara Dean her lady-like little opinion of him."

"Poor Clara!" Agnes said under her breath, her face clouding over, and Mrs. Goodwin, noticing her

niece's drawn brows, felt with complacency that the hint had been well given. Agnes should not be allowed to forget that there was some one more than ready to accept the prize she was willing to let slip. Nothing so enhances to us the worth of any possession as the knowledge that others value it. Not a dog but will snatch back the bone he has relinquished, if only another set a covetous paw upon it.

The Fourth dawned fair and warm. Agnes had an unwonted pink tinge in her creamy cheeks, and her hair, escaping from its heavy coil, lay about her face even more picturesquely than usual, a great wave falling from the side across her forehead in a sweep that would have been daring had it not been wholly natural. Mrs. Goodwin contemplated her with silent approbation. This all-day entertainment was a device of her own to bring Godfrey to Old Oaks on the customary familiar terms, and help him and Agnes over any awkwardness that might attach to their next meeting. After that, especially with Agnes looking so particularly lovely, all would go, of course, as Mrs. Goodwin wished.

Nothing but this cheering conviction sustained her under the depressing outlook of so many consecutive hours in the society of Mrs. Kilpatrick. That lady, with the promptness of the undesired, arrived at eleven o'clock precisely, leaving her two gentlemen to follow later, and was met by her hostess with an exalted Christian resignation of manner which quite passed itself off for cordiality,

while Mr. Alden, chancing to enter the room by another door at the same moment, instantly turned and slipped noiselessly out again.

Probably no experience is ever the same to any two persons, and the day that followed bore a distinctly different aspect to each of the party gathered at Old Oaks. To George Hart, recently engaged to Jennie Van Buren, it represented an unbroken opportunity for blissful devotion to his beloved, and to his brother a persistent failure to get speech apart with Agnes; while to Clara Dean it was simply a succession of pendulum-swings between gain and loss, as chance alternately brought Godfrey to her side or carried him away. To Godfrey the day was one of keen disappointment. There was nothing awkward, after all, about his meeting with Agnes. He would have thought it more hopeful if there had been. But there was no vestige of embarrassment or even of recollection in her manner. Of course their last talk had not meant to her anything of what it had meant to him, still he had hoped that it would mean more—not less—as she thought it over afterward, and though he had asked to be allowed to return on the old footing, that was not at all what he had secretly expected. For few petitions are offered up, even to the Deity, unqualified by some mental reservation, though men think themselves absolutely honest as they utter them.

Mrs. Goodwin, however, was well content. Her eyes rested with satisfaction on the pair when they met, and again when they stood chatting in outwardly unaltered fashion after luncheon, which was

served informally and daintily at little tables under the trees behind the house.

But though Agnes, as hostess, divided her attentions with perfect impartiality among her guests, she had no thought all that day for Godfrey. She had been talking with his father when the Mulgraves arrived, and had first been made aware of their approach by Jennie's whispered exclamation: "Oh, what eyes! That must be the poet!" Then something seemed to tingle through her from head to foot and ebb away again, taking her strength with it, and she felt herself grow pale. But the effort at self-control only lent her a new poise and dignity, which Dr. Kilpatrick, watching her with affectionate eyes as she moved toward the newcomers, thought a crowning grace in the girl who he hoped one day was to become his daughter.

She saw little of David until late that afternoon, when she chanced to be left with him as the party separated into couples for a walk through the grounds before dinner. Then a strange quiet came over her, sealing her lips; yet as they walked on, scarcely speaking, but each in some subtle way stimulating the appreciation of the other for every least beauty along the path, she felt that nothing lacked to their complete interchange of thought. This unexpressed yet perfect sympathy between them made their growing friendship a beautiful thing; but again at that curious something which went quivering through her veins, her heart stood still.

David and Isabel were the two to whom the day

brought the most unqualified enjoyment. It wrote itself in David's memory in blurred letters of gold, —an indistinct dream-like record of sunlight dropping brokenly through tall trees; of green shadows that lifted and fell across the slopes or lay sleepy and dim in the hollows; of cool, sweet breezes laden with a hundred different odours distilled into one intoxicating perfume; of a slow stroll, with a companion whose silence was speech, through woody spaces where the wind in the leaves was like the sighing of the sea, and where the song of the thrush repeated itself over and over in the half conscious ear like some lovely insistent thought, till there seemed for the time nothing to regret in all the past and everything to hope for from the future.

And Isabel proved the life of the occasion as Mrs. Goodwin had prophesied. Her animation infused ardour into the rest in spite of themselves, beginning with the game of croquet played by the young people, with Agnes as umpire, David meanwhile joining Dr. Kilpatrick and his host in the book-room, where the three had a congenial morning over the microscope and the classics, which went far to atone to Mr. Alden for the miseries of an all-day *fête*. At luncheon, it was again Isabel's gaiety that charged the atmosphere with an electric current of enjoyment to which even Mr. Alden was not insensible, though he attributed it to not yet having had more to do with Mrs. Kilpatrick than silently to shake hands with her; and afterward, when at Isabel's instigation they went on a tour through the mansion, familiar though it had long been to the

most of them, it seemed an entirely new place seen in the contagion of her enthusiasms.

They had completed the round and returned to the main floor, when lagging behind the others in one of the ante-rooms, Isabel stopped abruptly before a statue of an adorable little sleeping child, and Agnes, noticing that her face suddenly trembled and changed, came back to her while the rest passed on.

"Oh, it is so like—so like!" Isabel murmured with quivering lips. "I could think it was my own little boy grown to this."

A soft colour came into the other's face.

"I did not know you had a child," she said.

Isabel's eyes were full of tears.

"I have n't any. My baby died four years ago. He was nearly ten months old. He was the dearest —the sweetest—It almost broke David's heart when he died."

"And yours," Agnes added, taking Isabel's hand with a look of immeasurable compassion.

The tears dried in Isabel's eyes.

"No, it did not," she answered in a hard voice. "I felt horribly, of course, but — no, it did *not* break my heart." She turned impulsively to Agnes. Not even for fear of what others might think of her could she ever be anything but wholly outspoken, saying whatever was uppermost in her mind at the moment, less from honesty than for the relief of expression which to her ardent soul was always as immediate a necessity as air is to the suffocating.

" I was jealous of Davy," she went on. " David loved him so. He loved him better than he did me —I was sure of it—and Davy would never come to me when his father was in the room. Sometimes I almost hated the child. Of course you can't understand it, and of course it was unnatural and horrible of me. Still I felt that I had the first right to David's love, and I could n't bear to have even our baby rob me of it. And when he died—oh, I *was* heartbroken until I saw how David missed him, and then I knew that if he had lived they would have grown to be all in all to each other, and I should have been left out in the cold. I could not have borne that. I am so glad that I have never had a baby since. I was not meant to be a mother."

Agnes was surprised at herself that she was not more shocked; but as Isabel spoke, looking at her with frank, self-accusing eyes, hiding nothing, glossing nothing over, attempting no palliation, she could only be sorry for her as for an undisciplined child ignorant of what it confesses. Her hand closed more tightly round Isabel's.

" You would have felt differently if Davy had lived," she said gently. " You would have loved him with all your heart. You could not have helped it." She coloured again, still more softly, with the words. Oh, to have transmitted one's own life into another life — to have become a creative entity — a living link in a living chain reaching endlessly on down all the ages, a factor in life's farthest future, —was not that earth's one true immortality ? Could Isabel be really glad not to be a mother ?

"I suppose I should have loved him, of course," Isabel admitted, "for he was the sweetest thing you ever saw—such soft gold hair all in little rings, and he had David's eyes. I will show you his picture, some day. I have put it out of sight. I could n't leave it where David would see it and keep on loving him better than me. Do you think me a monster? Or do you understand at all — in the very least—how I feel?"

"I could not feel so," Agnes replied slowly. "But you are different from anybody I know—I can't judge you yet. By and by, when I know you better, perhaps I shall understand how *you* could feel so."

"That is perfectly fair and just — exactly what I knew you would be," Isabel said with conviction. "I should not like it if you tried to make excuses for me. But can you like me all the same, knowing how hateful I am? You really *must* try to like me a little, for I like you so very, *very* much!"

"I could not help liking you, even if I tried to," Agnes answered with a puzzled look at her. "I don't quite know why."

"Don't try not to like me—don't try!" exclaimed Isabel well pleased. "You are a darling, and I care more about your liking me than I can tell you."

Agnes scarcely knew how to respond to such effusiveness of affection. But Isabel boldly slipped a caressing arm about her waist and drew her after the rest of the party and speedily became her sparkling self again. Later, on the outdoor ramble, she found herself between Dr. Kilpatrick and Mr.

Alden, and was so charmingly vivacious and so interestingly interested, that the gallant doctor declared he had never enjoyed any walk as much. Mr. Alden, however, had an inveterate antipathy to young women matching his aversion to young men, and while no one could be more well disposed to those who came within the narrow circle of his esteem, no one was more obdurately exclusive in the choice of those so favoured, or more hopelessly disaffected toward all who remained without it. He grew increasingly bored as the walk progressed, wondering what possible attraction Matt could find in so aggressively emphatic a young person, and became completely dumb long before Mrs. Goodwin called him away to take his share of Mrs. Kilpatrick, after which time stood altogether still for Mr. Alden, and darkness covered the face of the land.

When the late dinner was ended the party adjourned to the tower, whose summit afforded an unobstructed view of the fireworks over the entire surrounding country. There was no moon, and the dark blue dome made a superb background against which was a blaze of light,— light rising, falling, floating, breaking, changing, vanishing, reappearing,—while not a sound was to be heard even from the bursting of the nearest bombs, all taking place in seemingly as absolute a silence as does the nightly procession of the stars. It was like a pantomimic rehearsal of the whole history of the heavens from the time when God said,—Let there be Light. Suns swirled mistily into being out of the nebulous distance, and planets were born as one looked. Moons

of many colours rose from every point of the horizon, dissolving into nothingness before they reached the zenith. Meteors shot dazzingly overhead, their passage dotted with a quivering trail of sparks. Comets rushed by in furious and eccentric splendour; here and there through the flickering ether auroral lights shone out with a steadiness of deceptive promise; and the lightnings of an interstellar storm crossed and recrossed the sky in mad, zigzag flashes, followed by the bursting of golden rains whose every drop resolved into a flower that budded and bloomed and died all in one transcendent instant. It was the apotheosis of an unimaginable Transitoriness. Wherever the eye turned the glory that it saw ceased to be in the moment that it was.

Toward the close of the evening David found himself near Agnes, who with her elbows on the balustrade and her chin on her clasped hands was standing lost in thought, looking soberly up at the fire-lit sky. In its brilliant light her face showed as clearly as by day, and David was struck afresh with the earnestness and self-unconsciousness of her expression. He felt irresistibly drawn to her, and she turned to him with a quiet relief of manner as if her thought had been awaiting his coming.

" You quoted something from Omar the first time we met, Mr. Mulgrave. You said that Heaven or Hell was in ourselves. Do you believe that ? "

It was impossible to make any but a serious rejoinder to eyes that looked so straightly into his. He had always to meet her on her own ground.

" I certainly believe that it is our characters rather

than our surroundings that determine our happiness or unhappiness. It is a time-old truth, and only new to each of us as we grow up to it."

Her direct frank gaze seemed to say her thought before she spoke it.

"Do we make our own miseries, then?"

There was a very friendly note in David's voice as he answered her.

"To a great extent we do. Nothing is so bad but we may make it better or worse by our attitude of mind toward it. We may not be in the least responsible for the conditions that hamper us, but we certainly are for the manner in which we meet them — don't you think so? — so that how we take our trials must be of infinitely greater importance to us than the trials themselves."

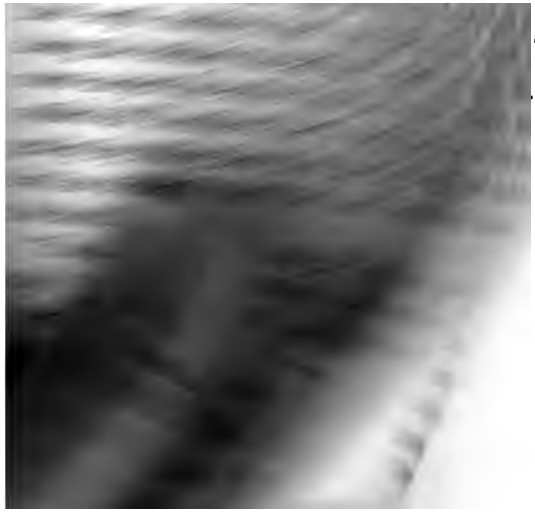
Agnes had been thinking of Isabel's confession, but as David spoke her mind reverted to herself, and her eyes shrank from his. She turned instantly away, her look changing to one of extreme reserve. But before he had time to remark it she began speaking again on an indifferent subject, and, the others joining in, the conversation became general. David, however, remained its leader, though so unconsciously and inconspicuously that none of the little circle suspected it, even when most yielding themselves to his influence. Besides the magnetism and temperamental graciousness which readily won him friends, he had a way of presupposing the general superiority of those about him which was of itself inspiring, and his searching eyes called out the best of every one upon whom they turned. In-

sensibly his stimulating brightness and charm diffused itself throughout the group. Mr. Alden, who during the evening's spectacle had stood abjectly at his post by Mrs. Kilpatrick, monosyllabic and unimpressed, recovered his spirits with a rebound in an alleviating forgetfulness of her presence, and entered into the talk with zest, adding an inimitable touch of drollery to whatever was said, while Mrs. Goodwin, who had been conveyed up to the tower for the occasion, surpassed herself in witticisms, and under the universal spell even Clara Dean became responsive.

A most interesting talk it was, as any conversation is bound to be in which each participant is made to feel that his own contribution is indispensable, and all were loath to break it up. But at last the evening came to an end, and the family were left to gather in the book-room and discuss the events of the day after the usual fashion of hosts.

"Do you know," observed Mrs. Goodwin, luxuriating in the comfort of unrestrained comment as if from the exchange of a ball-room costume for a dressing-gown, "that poet has a great deal more in him than his rhymes. He is infectiously June-hearted. He makes you feel that the sun is shining and that it is good to be alive. He is so delightful that I forget he is a poet."

"He is a well-informed, modest, and agreeable young man," said Mr. Alden with conservative assent. "It is a thousand pities he should waste himself on verses of his own when he has such critical perception for Pindar."



restful of creatures, and that she hoped some day to have a daughter exactly like her. Humph! Restful! Well, yes, like a cedar-tree,—the same colour at all seasons. Ugh! That woman gives me the neuralgia. If it were not for Godfrey I would never ask her within these doors again. But Godfrey—" She looked at Agnes with an affectionate smile.

"Godfrey is a dear," Agnes replied to the smile. "I like him better than ever. And I hope he will marry Clara by and by."

And then she said good-night and went away, leaving Mrs. Goodwin in doubt whether to be disappointed or hopeful.

Agnes did not go to her own rooms at once. She kept on up the stairs, up, and up, and up, until she came out again on the summit of the tower. It was very late; the moonless night looked doubly dark contrasted with the flare and glow of the preceding hours, and the great flag, curling and uncurling itself around the pole at the touch of a light breeze, gave a sense of eerie companionship that heightened the solitude.

Agnes bent back her head and looked up. The stars, which had been lost in the light, were disclosed anew by the darkness, and hung over her, calm, changeless, and solemn, in that majesty of the immutable and enduring that is so infinitely beyond the utmost glory of the variable and evanescent. Agnes threw out her arms with a sudden sob.

"How am I to meet this?" she [illegible] tumult

of bewilderment and shame. "God help me. What shall I do?"

But the silence held no reply. All mortals must work out their life-questions by themselves; for whatever the answer, it is in the working out of its own problems that each soul's salvation lies.

CHAPTER XI

AT A TOUCH

At a touch sweet Pleasure melteth,
Like to bubbles when rain pelteth.

— KEATS.

WHATEVER Isabel desired she sought with impetuosity, and having set her heart on winning Agnes for a friend she followed up the acquaintance so eagerly as to leave her no chance to withdraw. On one pretext or another she was constantly calling at Old Oaks or claiming return visits, and the more Agnes saw of her the more Isabel's fascination took hold of her and the more impossible she found it to respond half-heartedly to her advances. David frequently accompanied his wife to Old Oaks, but Isabel always took instant possession of Agnes, with an air of exclusive proprietorship like a notice to others to stand aside, so that Agnes saw little of him on such occasions, while as the autumn came on and his professorship ensured his absence from home at stated hours, she easily timed her visits to Hidaway to avoid meeting him.

"Do come oftener!" Isabel urged, pouting her mouth temptingly out in the middle and drawing it pleadingly down at the corners. "I do want you so!"

And when Isabel looked at any one with such importunate blue eyes there was little use in attempting to resist. She would not be denied. She soon demanded that they should call each other by their Christian names, and Agnes hesitatingly consented, with a curious feeling that she was thereby setting her sign manual to a deed of friendship that no future act could repeal. Next, Isabel insisted that certain mornings of the week should be set aside for readings, and to Agnes these meetings soon became an unmitigated pleasure, for Isabel was as thoroughly acquainted with the modern writers as was her friend with those of the past, and Agnes read whatever was proposed with a discrimination and judgment that delighted her guide, and with an avidity that was almost pathetic.

They were at Old Oaks one morning in her little sitting-room, one side of which consisted of a great bay-window with three enormous single panes that reached from the floor to the ceiling, giving the room an open-air effect, which was very charming. One pane faced the east, another the west, and the central and largest one framed in, like a picture planned in the building, a magnificent oak growing on the slope below. Agnes sat looking out while Isabel read. It was one of those wonderful Indian-summer days when the near sunshine seems to lie wet upon the ground, and the far hills smoke through rosy rain. Her gaze wandered lingeringly over the hazy landscape, coming back always to rest upon the oak, whose sturdy leaves had changed from green to brown, with occasional splashes of

red as if its heart's blood had throbbed through and stained them. Agnes wondered if the oak, too, felt pain as life's experiences passed over it.

"Don't let us read Keats any more. I don't care for his classic similes as you do," Isabel said at last, flinging down the book. "We will have this instead." She took a crumpled paper from her pocket and tossed it over to Agnes. "There. That is David's last poem. He throws everything away after he has made a press copy, and I rescued it from the scrap-basket for you. You may have it if you like."

Agnes drew back as the sheet fell into her lap.

"But would Mr. Mulgrave like me to read it?"

"Of course, if I choose," Isabel replied, surprised at the scruple. "David's poems are as much mine as his. All that he is and does is mine, you know. And this is nothing private. It will be in his new collection. Read it. I want to hear how it sounds in your beautiful voice."

Agnes lifted the sheet hesitatingly, glancing down the closely written lines, however, with an eagerness that she could not repress. Then she went over it critically, weighing each syllable with a sensuous delight in its fitness, and finally, as Isabel became impatient at the delay, she read it aloud.

"Well?" Isabel questioned as she finished. "But you need n't say anything. I know from your face what you think of it. What joy to hear you read it! I would give anything in the world to have a voice like yours."

Agnes got up and laid the paper away in her desk.

"I think," she said slowly, coming back to the window and sitting down by Isabel, "I think it is the most beautiful—yes, the most perfectly beautiful poem I ever read."

Isabel laughed exultingly.

"So do I—now. I love David's poems when they are done. But I hate them while they are doing—they take so much of his time from me."

"You *hate* them? ever?"

"Well, if David loved me as I want him to, he would not get so absorbed in writing them. A married man has no right to be wedded to art, too."

"Then the degree of Bachelor of Arts entails celibacy?"

"Oh, I am not joking, Agnes, I assure you. We ought to be all the world to each other, for David has not a relative living, and I have only a hateful half-uncle in San Francisco, who stopped my allowance as soon as I married, so he does not count. I ought to be all in all to David. But how can I be if his poems come between us?"

"How could they possibly come between you? Have you not just said that all he is and does is yours, too?"

"Y—yes. That is the way I want to feel about it. But it is hard to feel the way one wants to." She fidgetted a moment in her seat, then looked up at Agnes with the disarming trustfulness that made it impossible to judge her harshly. "Do you know, Agnes, every now and then, before I realize it, I say dreadful things to David. I am as sorry as I can be afterward and determine to bite my tongue

out before I speak so again. But something gets the better of me always, and I am exactly as bad—or worse—the very next time. It is never David's fault. It is always I who am to blame. He is the noblest man that ever lived. Still I do think he is a little hard with me, for he says I ought to be able to control myself, and I have tried, and I can't. I am made so. I can not change my nature, can I, Agnes?"

"Yes! Yes! One can if only one will," Agnes answered with conviction. "It is not safe to think anything else. One can."

"I am not so sure," Isabel returned doubtfully. "I don't think it is possible to hold every feeling under absolute control,—I mean to stop feeling a certain way just because one wants to. Can you?"

An accusing thought struck Agnes dumb. She sat quite still and pale for a moment or two before she answered.

"If some feeling gets too deep a hold upon us," she said then, "if it has become almost a part of us, it may not be possible to uproot it just at first. But we can act as if it were not there. We can force ourselves to give no manner of expression to it even to ourselves. That will cut it down to the roots. And so perhaps in the end the roots will die of inanition. But we should never let go of ourselves—never,—for one single instant!"

Isabel sat looking at her with an absorbed attention that seemed a guarantee of acquiescence.

"You are absolutely right, Agnes. It does not do to let go of oneself. And I do not mean to ever

again. Oh, you do me so much good! You give me back faith in myself, just as David does. If you only knew how disgusted I get with myself! Why is it that I fail so miserably? I mean to go so far —to be so much! No one has higher ideals than I have."

"Ideals should be stepping-stones as well as stars," Agnes answered diffidently, and, fearing she was growing didactic, she changed the subject by producing a portfolio of foreign photographs, which Isabel seized upon enthusiastically and lingered over for a long time.

"You don't mean that it is half-past twelve!" she exclaimed, as the clock struck. "I promised David that I would be home by now for an early luncheon. He is to take me for a long drive this afternoon. You need not shut up that portfolio, though, Agnes. I must see the rest. It is like visiting the galleries themselves."

"You shall see them the next time, Isabel. I ought not to keep you longer, now."

"You are not keeping me. I am keeping myself. Agnes, I *will* see them." She caught up a Botticelli. "Oh, is n't this the divinest thing! What a composition! Look at that expression—that pose —the folds of that drapery! Think of conceiving anything so entrancing! What saint sat for his model! Look at it, Agnes. You have got to enjoy it with me."

Not till she had seen the very last picture would she allow the portfolio to be laid aside. It was one o'clock by that time, and as she was fastening her

hat over the unruly hair that stood out crisply all about her small piquant face, Mrs. Goodwin sent up a proposal that she should remain for luncheon and go afterward with Agnes to the Philharmonic Rehearsal for which she had two seats. Isabel's face grew radiant. She tossed off her hat again with a happy laugh.

"Stay, and go to the Philharmonic? Of course I will! Oh, that dear Mrs. Goodwin, how she does always think of exactly what I want most on earth to do!"

"But your drive?" Agnes interposed unwillingly. "I thought——"

"I can't throw away a diamond for a rhinestone!" Isabel cried brightly. "Besides, David and I are going to the concert next week, and I shall enjoy it twice as much if I hear the rehearsal first. One can't take in that marvellous Ninth Symphony at one hearing. I adore music just as much as I do painting and poetry and other heavenly things that make one feel the wings in one's soul. Oh, this is to be the deliciousest day all through! I do think I have the dearest, kindest friends in the world!"

There was no withstanding her. Her eyes danced; her cheeks were tinged the softest rose-pink; her whole face sparkled with joyous anticipation. Even Mr. Alden had grudgingly to admit the extreme prettiness of her when she finally went away with Agnes, flashing back a smile over her shoulder.

David, meanwhile, waited at home for his truant

wife. This afternoon was the only one that he had had free for weeks, and she had declared that she wanted a drive with him more than anything else on earth. Experience, however, had taught him that she would fail to keep the appointment should any more inviting project present itself to her capricious fancy. So he was not surprised when the messenger, whom Agnes had insisted upon sending, brought him a hasty scribble from Isabel announcing her changed plan as at two o'clock he sat down to his promised half-past twelve luncheon.

The meal over, he applied himself to work. It was not often that he had a chance of such unbroken leisure, and a lyric had been singing itself in his brain ever since the woods began to redden. He sat down at his writing-table, and as he took up his pen the walls of the room fell away and he was in the heart of an autumnal forest that took him to itself and made itself one with him, delivering up all its secrets to the intimacy of his understanding. And he listened with rapt ears, and wrote down what he heard and saw, and time flew by on wings. The maid, coming in on some small household mission, was so struck by the look upon his face that she quietly withdrew, leaving her errand undone. She had been in the Mulgraves' service ever since their marriage, and had come to recognize that look as one he wore now only when he was alone.

It was nearly the dinner hour by the time Isabel returned. She ran in excited and happy, bringing Agnes with her. David was too absorbed to notice their light steps in the hall, and Agnes caught sight

of his face before he turned. It was as if she had stolen a glimpse into his Holy of Holies. Then Isabel danced up to him and he rose to his feet with a hasty welcome.

"I made Miss Alden come in to help me out with my excuses, David. I believe it quite spoiled the afternoon for her fearing I had disappointed you about the drive. But I told her you would n't mind. You did not, did you?"

"You put me in a quandary," David answered pleasantly, gathering his papers together and thrusting them away. "It would be unpardonably selfish to say yes, and ungallant to say no."

"There!" Isabel exclaimed triumphantly. "You see it did n't matter, Agnes. I knew he could not want me to lose a pleasure. Besides he never misses me when he is writing. How I do hate your writing, David! You must not touch it again for days. And oh, I have the nicest plan for to-night! You shall read *Coriolanus* to me. Miss Alden and I were discussing it on the way home and I want to hear it again. It always acts on my mind like a tonic. I shall enjoy it as much as I did the rehearsal."

David turned round quickly.

"I am sorry, Isabel, but you know I have to meet Mr. Davis by eight o'clock."

Isabel's bright face clouded over as suddenly as an April landscape darkens.

"O David! Not to-night! You surely will not keep that stupid engagement and leave me alone the entire evening through when I have not seen

you for a single moment all day! It would be too horrid of you!"

"But it is not a matter of choice, Isabel. The engagement was made ten days ago. You know I cannot break it."

"I know nothing of the kind," Isabel retorted hotly. "*I* would break it for *you* in a moment. I will not forgive you if you go, David!"

"We need not discuss it now, need we?" he suggested. "The subject can hardly be of interest to Miss Alden."

"You drag Agnes in only as an excuse to put me off," Isabel cried rebelliously. "You intend not to give up the engagement, and I do think you might this once. *I* would never dream of leaving *you* after a whole day away from you. You do not love me or you would not do it. You are hateful!"

Her eyes were full of angry tears. David's face hardened a little and the line between his straight black brows deepened, but his voice had lost none of its quiet as he turned apologetically to Agnes.

"Mr. Davis—a man I am to meet on especial business,—leaves the city to-morrow morning. Isabel forgot this, or she would not have wished me to break the appointment."

"Oh, of course business must come before your wife," Isabel interposed with twitching lips. "Go by all means. But I won't stay here to be alone this evening. I will go back with Agnes now, and you can call for me at Old Oaks on your way home." She caught Agnes by the sleeve, turning to her a

suppliant spoiled-child face. "I may, may n't I, Agnes? *You* will not refuse me, will you?'

Agnes looked anxiously across at David.

"Will you not come, too, Mr. Mulgrave? I should be so glad if you would both dine with us this evening."

David's eyes softened as they met hers.

"You are too good, Miss Alden. But I should be late for my appointment. If Isabel goes it must be without me."

Isabel waited for no further invitation.

"How dear you are, Agnes! I knew *you* would want me. And I need not change my gown? Come. Let us go at once."

She brushed past David with an averted face, and, hurrying out of the house, flew across the lawn to the gate. Agnes followed more slowly, David accompanying her. On the way she stopped and turned to him pleadingly.

"Is it impossible for you to come, too?"

As she stood before him under the yellowing maples in a soft woollen gown the colour of dead leaves, she seemed an impersonation of the autumnal beauty of that outside world that they both so loved in all its phases. A leaf fluttered down and caught in the creamy lace folded across her bosom. She lifted her hands to it and held them there, making her question seem a petition. David looked down at her gratefully.

"It is quite impossible. But I thank you again."

Her face grew very sober. She turned and walked on in silence.

" Hurry, Agnes! " Isabel called from the carriage.

" Miss Alden," David said, coming to her side and bending toward her so that his low tones might reach her. " May I tell you how glad I am of the friendship between you and Isabel? She needs you. Be good to her."

Agnes paused, surprised, and lifted her eyes again. A beautiful light shone out suddenly in their clear depths.

" I will," she answered, and in her heart the promise was a vow.

" Agnes! Agnes! " Isabel called impatiently.

" True and steadfast as the stars," David said to himself as he watched the carriage drive away; and the look came again to his face that had been there that afternoon.

CHAPTER XII

THE FLYING SPARKS

At God's forges incandescent
Mighty hammers beat incessant,
These are but the flying sparks.
— LONGFELLOW.

FROM that time Isabel frequently entrusted to Agnes the press copy of one of David's unpublished poems for perusal and comment, sure of the praise of which she was lavish enough herself after the work's completion. But alas for the disheartening histories of ugly tempers and graceless outbreaks of which she as often made Agnes the unwilling confidante! She reported every lapse on her part in unfeigned humility and penitence, and with such honest self-accusations and such reiterated intentions of amendment that each time hope rose phœnix-like from its ashes. No one could talk more intelligently or more eloquently than Isabel of her duties and aims, or act more diametrically in opposition to them. She was always repenting but never reforming, always clinging to her ideals as to the ladders by which to mount to divinest heights, but never lifting a foot to climb. Nevertheless the interest which Agnes had taken in her from the first

had already deepened into a devoted attachment to this irresponsible, contradictory, fascinating creature, who wound herself round her friend's heart with a thousand intangible ties, making of herself a continual puzzle and enchantment and disappointment.

"Why do I behave so? Why can't I control myself?" she would ask tearfully, looking at Agnes as if her soul's salvation hung upon her friend's advice, and apparently accepting it as an open furrow takes in the dropped seed. Yet at the first breath of temptation every good resolve was forgotten and every shred of self-control scattered to the winds. Little by little Agnes grew sick at heart, though she studiously concealed it from Isabel. For the soul must have faith in its pinions before it will essay to fly, and to confirm her in believing that her wings lacked power would be to chain her to the earth. Not a word had passed between Agnes and David in regard to Isabel since the autumn afternoon when he had asked her friendship for his wife, but she knew that on that day they two had joined hands for life in this struggle with a weak human soul. Two against one for the good of that one. Must not strength prove stronger than weakness? Must not the two prevail?

So came the winter and the holidays, toward the end of which there dawned a morning out of Fairyland. There had been a heavy snow-storm a few days before, followed by an intense, still cold which kept the pristine beauty of the snow intact. Then came a slight thaw in the night and a rain that froze as it fell, and the sun rose upon a diamond world.

Agnes gave a cry of rapture as she looked out of her window. The frostwork of the pane lay before her magnified into a landscape. Hills, lawns, roads,—all was one white dazzle as far as eye could reach. The lustre of it was inconceivable. Every snow-wreathed tree and shrub was sheeted in clear ice and hung from top to bottom with icicles along which the light leaped with the brilliancy of a firebolt. Not a branch but bore its freight of luminous transparence and pendant crystals. Not the tiniest twig but held a drop of frozen iridescence. The earth lay like a mirror beneath the sun, flashing back each ray broken into a thousand blinding splinters. Light—light—light—all was light, glittering, scintillating, blazing,—a glory that could scarcely be borne to look upon. Then a little breeze blew softly out of the nowhere across the stillness, and the crystals became so many bejewelled swords, crossing and recrossing in ghostly conflict. Never anywhere was there fought such a battle as this of the field of the cloth of silver. There were no trumpets summoning to arms; no bloodshed, no dying; only light fighting with light in a wonderful white fury that stained no breast and left no scars,—only that and the music of innumerable blades clashing faintly together until they broke and fell, strewing the shining ground with shattered splendour.

Agnes could scarcely tear herself from the window. She was there again later in the morning when two fur-clad figures, swinging their skates, came slipping and sliding along the icy road, and

presently David and Isabel stood beneath her, laughing up like a couple of children and signing to her to join them. In a few moments she was beside them, as ready for frolic as they, an ermine cap pressed down over her shining hair, and her long scarlet coat making a grateful spot of colour on the ubiquitous whiteness.

"Was there ever such a morning since the ice age!" David exclaimed. "We had to come out and be a part of it. It has gotten into my blood. I want to shout a hurrah that shall echo to the heavens!"

"There are the Ivory Gates! Come!" cried Isabel, clapping her hands. "Who will race me to them? I am Atalanta! Catch me who can!"

"Mine, even without the golden apples!" laughed David, raising her as she slipped and fell at his feet. "Oh, what a world this is! Who has any right to be unhappy in it? Follow me! I am Wind—I am Fire — I am Frost—I am Light — I am all the elementary things that we are in the midst of and that I love as I love Life!"

He threw out his arms with a free fine gesture. Some immeasurable vitality seemed to possess him, as if the spirit within him claimed kinship with the universe. As Agnes looked at him there flashed from his soul to hers a new perception of what it meant to be at one with nature.

"If only you could write a poem now — out here!" she said involuntarily.

"I can! I will!" cried David. "I will write you a titanic sonnet, with that hill for my tablet and the sunlight for my pen!"

" The sonnet must go unwritten," laughed Isabel, catching at his arm half in sport, half in earnest. " This is my day, and you promised to take me skating."

" How can Atalanta's feet need wings ? " objected David, smilingly. " But come then. Let us be off."

Arriving at the pond, an isolated spot as yet undiscovered by the public, they found there several friends who were in the guarded secret of its whereabouts, and who had been lured to it like themselves by the promise of unrivalled sport, and soon they were all skimming merrily over its surface, Isabel in wild spirits, and David the life and animation of the company, radiating joy about him as the sun radiates light.

Toward the end of the morning he skated up to Agnes, who stood for the moment alone.

" Am I not entitled to a turn by right of being your escort ? "

She gave him her hand and they glided away, bending and swaying in long, graceful, exhilarating curves, swifter and swifter, with lifted heads and dilating eager eyes, not a word spoken between them until they had completed the round and returned to their starting-point. Then they stopped, and, turning to each other simultaneously, smiled in perfect understanding.

" I feel as if I had been flying," Agnes said, " borne along by your thought through unknown spaces and incalculable distances."

" Where to ? "

" I do not know. You led. It is for you to say."

" Am I to be Moses and Aaron, too ? "

" Yes. It is your talent's double privilege."

" Did you ever think," David asked more seriously, " what it means to have it a duty to express not only one's best, but also somewhat of that larger joy and hope of which one's own is so infinitesimal a portion ? "

" Yes," Agnes answered. " I often think of it. To bring the finite nearer to the infinite is a tremendous obligation. Genius imposes heavy taxes. But "— she looked at him confidently —" the rich can pay."

" How skilfully you cover your spurs with flowers! " David cried joyously. " But it is for the prick of the steel that I thank you most! "

And then Isabel came up and slipped her arm round Agnes with a little injured air that said plainly: " You are *my* friend. Why are you talking with him ? " And David turned away.

When the party was about to break up, Agnes insisted that they should all return with her to Old Oaks for luncheon, so that it was late in the afternoon before David and Isabel started for Hidaway. The day had changed since noon. It was grown warmer and cloudy and snow was beginning to fall again in large scattered flakes. A wind caught the end of Isabel's fur cloak, and as David folded it closer about her she laughed up at him delightedly.

" I love to be in a snow-storm. I love to feel the soft, wet touches on my cheek. They are like baby kisses, are n't they ? "

David made no answer and his face contracted sharply.

"O David! David dear!" Isabel exclaimed, divining the pain caused by her thoughtless words. "Don't look like that! Don't think of Davy! Look happy again. I love you so — more than Davy ever would have—more than you have any idea of. I love you with all the love of all my life. And I do so want to make you happy—happier and happier all the time. I wish there were some way of proving it to you — of spending myself for you. Put your arm round me, David—there is no one to see—hold me close!"

She smiled at him through moist eyes, and he stooped suddenly and kissed her. She laid her head against his shoulder.

"I am so proud of you," she murmured caressingly. "I can't tell you the half that people say about you, but it is all true—every word of it—and every one is asking how soon your new collection will be out. They are wild to see it, and they may well be. This book is a glorious advance even on the last."

"If it is not an advance of some sort it is a rank failure," David said positively. "Unprogressive art cannot be true art."

"But it *is* the greatest advance, David. Your last volume was wonderful. But this is infinitely beyond it."

David sighed the unsatisfied sigh of the creator appraising his creation.

"You judge by your heart, dear, not your brain.

My last book is crude enough compared with fit standards. But if the years have brought me anything this must be the gainer. I have put my utmost into it."

Isabel rubbed her soft face against his coat.

"How hateful I have been to you about it, David! I can't understand myself. I long to be such a help to you as no wife ever was before to any man, and yet I seem always doing my best to hold you back."

David's hand closed over the small fingers on his arm. The strong grasp seemed to promise forgiveness, encouragement, and support all in one.

"Let us make another start, Isabel. Let us make life always what it has been to-day."

And Isabel vowed that it should never be anything else, and that she loved him better than at any time in all her life, affirming it with such sweet, tender tones and in such winsome ways that David would have been a churl to disbelieve her. Their home looked more attractive than ever as they entered it out of the now fast-driving snow. The curtains were closely drawn, the lamps were lighted, and a glorious wood fire was crackling hospitably in the library, to which they turned after laying aside their damp wraps. Isabel threw on a needless log to show that she wanted to do something for him, turned up the student lamp, got out his manuscript and uncovered the inkstand,— all so deftly and prettily that he could but watch her admiringly.

"Now sit here and work," she said, laying an inviting hand on the back of his writing chair. "I

shall have just an hour before dinner for a nap, and you can write all that time, and then I shall be quite rested and you will have finished the loveliest poem on earth, and to-night we can go to the pantomime."

"But Isabel," David exclaimed in surprise, "you know I told you this morning that if I gave up the day to you I could not go to-night, too. You had your choice."

"Oh, yes, I know. But that was this morning, and I wanted the skating most then. Now I want the pantomime most. Clara Dean says it is the finest thing of the kind ever given in Battleborough, and I can't miss it. Those scenic effects thrill me like music."

"Why did n't you agree to go with Miss Alden, then, when she asked you?"

Isabel smiled at him winningly.

"Because I prefer to go with you, David. I hate big theatre-parties. You will go, won't you?"

"Dear, you know I cannot. As it is I shall have to work half the night through to make up for this long holiday."

"But write now, David. I will put off the dinner half an hour. That will give you all the time you need. I do want to go *dreadfully*. I never in my whole life wanted to see anything so much."

"Then let me send word to Miss Alden that you have changed your mind and will go with her."

"No, no!" pouted Isabel. "You really must take me, David. I don't want to go without you. I did not marry you to play at being widow."

" You said at the time that you married me to be my real wife and comrade even at the cost of any self-sacrifice," David answered, smiling at her, yet sighing faintly too.

" I suppose I did," Isabel admitted reluctantly. " And of course I feel the same now. I always feel the same. I would give up anything for you. Only it is not just—really, David, it is not just, that *all* the sacrifices—every single one of them—should be on my side!"

Her voice had risen. There was the pucker between her brows that David knew so well.

" Of course not," he answered, still very gently. " And as far as my preferences go I will sacrifice them to yours every time and not know that I have done so. But when it comes to my work —— "

" Oh, your work—your work!" Isabel interrupted bitterly. " Whenever I particularly want anything, I am always put aside for the work's sake! But of course so long as the poems are written it does n't matter if you break your wife's heart! If I died you would n't care—it would give you the more time to write!"

" Isabel!"

" Well, then, come with me to-night. Will you, or won't you ?"

David went to her and put his arm tenderly about her.

" Darling, you were so sweet — so dear — only a moment ago. We seemed so one. Why will you be unreasonable now ? You understood it all this morning."

"It is you who are unreasonable! Can't you see that I want you to go not so much for the sake of the pantomime as to have you prove—I will never ask it again — but just this once — that you do love me better than anything else on earth—better even than your writing? Oh, *please* take me, David!"

She put her arms about his neck, half crying. David released himself a little sternly.

"Don't be a child, Isabel! Don't make this whim a test of my love! I wish with all my heart that I could take you, but you know as well as I do that my manuscript is promised positively to Davis & Thorne for next Tuesday, and that I can barely finish this poem between now and then. Remember how long it is. And I cannot put them off again."

"But what would one poem less matter, David? Let the book go without it."

"When the whole collection is so small that without this one it would not be worth publishing at all?"

"Then work at it to-morrow and next day. Why must you work just to-night when I want you?"

David made a gesture of weariness. It was difficult to keep his irritation under, but he forced himself to speak lightly.

"O child, what a treadmill you make of it! Have n't I told you that I need *all* the remaining time to finish this one poem? You know how slowly I revise."

"I know that you do not begin to love me as you

used to, or you would find some way to do this little thing to please me. Confess that you don't love me, David! Confess that your love for me is dead!"

David drew a sharp breath.

"Love dies hard, Isabel. But even a love like mine *can* be killed. Why will you run the risk of killing it?"

Isabel stamped her foot.

"It is you who are killing mine. You never loved me, David, or you could never have come to treat me so odiously. You had no right to marry me and make me miserable. You are hard — you are selfish — you are cruel! I hate you, David — I hate you and your work! I don't know which I hate the worse!"

"Hush!" David said quickly, putting out his hand to stop her. "I know you do not mean it, but things like these are not to be said, even only in anger."

"I do mean it — I mean every syllable!" Isabel cried stormily. "I hate you and your new book with all my heart!"

She threw a furious glance at the manuscript where it lay in a neat pile of quarto sheets written out for the press, and with a sob turned and rushed from the room, flinging the door noisily to behind her. David stood debating whether or not to follow her. In such moods, however, she was not to be reasoned with nor soothed, and was usually best left alone until she came to herself; so after an instant's uncertainty he went to the table, and, pushing aside his work, sat revolving his life's problem in

his mind as he had countless times before. How far could he reconcile his duty to Isabel with his duty to himself? How far was he justified in sacrificing his talent to her jealousy and ceaseless exactions? Much as he owed his wife, did he not owe something also to his fellows? Was his talent his own to do with as he pleased? Was it not a sacred trust of which he was only the steward?

A moment later, as he sat with his head buried in his hands, Isabel came in again very quietly, her face singularly pale and set. Passing by David, she went swiftly round to the other side of the table, and before he realized that she was in the room, she caught up the entire pile of manuscript and flung the loose sheets into the thickest of the fire, breaking into a sobbing laugh so full of anger, defiance, and unreason that it was pitiful to hear. Startled at the sound and at the sudden outburst of light, David lifted his head and saw what she had done. With a cry of consternation he leaped from his chair to the hearth at a bound, brushing Isabel out of the way like a feather, and, plunging both hands up to the wrists into the flames, clutched desperately at the burning sheets. But already it was too late. The fire was roaring far up the chimney, every sheet was a solid blaze, and the few twisted bits that he brought away crumbled into flakes beneath his feet as he fiercely trod out the flames. He straightened himself up again and stood glaring at the fire, the smell of the burnt paper obtruding itself curiously upon his nostrils, while a mass of tiny black ashes fluttered out into the room and fell thickly over

him. By a freak of his mentality his memory retained nothing of his own composing, and those floating atoms represented all that was left him of the one only record of his poems. There was no rewriting what was lost,—no possible retrieving of what Isabel had done. In that moment of ungoverned rage she had destroyed the work of years.

For a terrible instant anger suffocated thought. Then he turned and looked at Isabel. She faced him undauntedly, still defiant, still laughing that pitiful laugh; but his look appalled her, and she grew white about the mouth. His eyes blazed with such concentrated fury and contempt as she had never conceived of. His nostrils quivered: lines of uneven red streaked his cheeks, and his mouth was shut like iron on words that would have blasted her if he had spoken them. She recoiled in terror of him.

"*David!*" she cried. "*David!*"

Still he said nothing, but his look burned through her and withered her soul. With an inarticulate cry she sank in a heap on the floor and hid her face, and, feeling his look through her closed fingers, she cowered lower yet, lifting her arms above her head as if to shield it from a blow. Then she heard him turn and go out of the room, each slow heavy step a denouncement of her; and while she listened, spent and breathless, the front door opened and closed; and then there was no more sound save the spluttering and hissing of the fire on the hearth, and the soft thud of the wet snow blown against the windows.

Hours went by. Mary looked in to be told that no dinner would be wanted and that she was not to

come again. The fire burnt itself out. The room grew cold, and the storm beat more and more icily against the panes. Isabel never moved.

It was after midnight when the door opened once more and David came in. She knew his step and breathed quickly, but she did not look up from where she lay upon the floor, limp and exhausted with sobbing. He came and stood beside her, his face drawn and white but not with physical suffering, though the hand was bandaged with which he pushed back his matted hair as he looked down at her. Then he stooped and gathered her up in his arms, and she turned her face wretchedly out of sight against his breast, and waited for what was to come.

"Isabel," he said. And at the sound of his voice and the pardon and pity in it she began to sob again in long-drawn broken breaths, and when at last she lifted her swollen lids and saw him smiling at her, sadly but very sweetly, she broke down utterly, and all her passionate, hopeless remorse came pouring out in a rush of stammering incoherence.

David waited some time before he spoke. When he did his voice was without a trace of anger, but grave as she had never heard it before.

"I thought at first that I could not forgive you, Isabel,—what you did meant so much to me. But afterward—" He paused, a great tenderness swept over his face, and he pressed her to him with sudden vehemence. "O my Isabel—my little wife!" he said. "I would give my life for yours. But what can I do to reach and help your soul!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE WORLD IS CHANGED

The face of all the world is changed.
— E. B. BROWNING.

A WEEK went by, during which, owing to various unimportant causes, Isabel and Agnes did not meet. At the end of that time Mrs. Goodwin's maid chanced to mention in Mr. Alden's hearing that her mistress had had a bad night, and he at once took it upon himself to send for Dr. Kilpatrick, who came flying merrily out in his cutter, well pleased at the excuse for an early sleigh ride. Arriving at Old Oaks he found the presumed invalid in the book-room, very wide-awake and brisk, and in the full swing of an exciting wrangle with her brother-in-law over the superfluousness of medical interference. The doctor was instantly informed by Mr. Alden that Jane was an exceedingly ill woman, having caught a chill the evening before by obstinately sitting in a draughty window, while Mrs. Goodwin as positively assured him that there was nothing in all this wide world the matter with her save that she had become too over-heated to sleep from wrapping up to please Jefferson. She was sufficiently indisposed, however, to relish the spicy con-

troversy as a jaded palate enjoys the titillation of a pickled meat, and the doctor, seeing that little else was required of him, gallantly flung himself into the fray only to be immediately routed by both parties.

"As if *you* could be expected to know anything about it!" Mr. Alden wound up crushingly. "A question of hygiene is the last thing that your bigoted medical schools have qualified you to pronounce upon. Only, as Jane is determined to kill herself sooner or later anyway, I thought you might as well prescribe for her and hurry her along. However, now that you are here, let me settle the point we were discussing the other day, and prove to you once for all that those Mitylenean envoys never could have made the speech in Thucydides."

"Gag Thucydides for to-day," responded the doctor, good-humouredly. "I have no time this morning to be bullied into recantation. I am off to Fairfields directly to an old woman who is cutting a wisdom-tooth. By the way, Agnes, how is that friend of yours there getting on with his burned hand?"

Agnes had just come into the room with a vase of tea-roses. She set it down on the nearest table.

"Mr. Mulgrave? His burned hand! What do you mean?"

"Nothing serious; only he called at the house to have it dressed a week or so ago between ten and eleven at night, looking as if he had been tramping in the snow for hours. It was a nasty evening, and he confessed to walking all the way in. Why did n't he ride? What are the new cars for?"

"But how did he burn his hand?" Agnes inquired anxiously, coming forward.

"Well, so far as I could make out—he is as close-mouthed as some are close-fisted — he had bungled over the hearth fire that afternoon. Your poets can bridle a fire-spitting Pegasus, but they can't handle every-day pokers and tongs, it seems. I asked him why he had waited so long to have the burns seen to, and he answered quite simply that he 'had n't thought about them sooner.' Fancy that! They were pretty bad, too. That wife of his ought to have looked after him and not let him moon round with his hand in such a condition."

"Oh, a fellow with Promethean fire in his brain need not mind falling foul of a blazing log any more than a Maleager," said Mr. Alden, with a gentle chuckle. "Now if you had but clapped a poultice of poems to his hand, Matt, it would have healed in a mere rhyme or two, I warrant you."

"Lucky that he did not burn the house down with his amateur stokering," muttered Mrs. Goodwin. "What a scare he must have given that little wife of his!"

A presentiment of some great trouble took possession of Agnes, though whether relating to trouble past or to come she could not tell. She grew cold all over.

"Unless you need me, Aunt Jane, I will go to see how Isabel is," she said, speaking with the extreme quiet that is so often a mask for the reverse, and Mrs. Goodwin, looking up assentingly at the tall fair girl, thought irrelevantly how rapidly Agnes

was maturing, and what a charm was in her womanliness and self-poise.

Dr. Kilpatrick, delighted at the chance of her companionship, instantly volunteered to take her to Fairfields, and she was leaving the room to prepare for the drive, when an exclamation from him arrested her.

"Heavens! Who is that, and what ails her?"

He was standing at a window, and the next instant he slid it back with rough energy, pushed aside the double door and sprang out on the piazza to meet a figure that at sight of him turned from the front steps and flew toward him. It was Isabel Mulgrave, wild and haggard looking almost beyond recognition.

"Is he here? Have you seen him?" she cried breathlessly.

"Who? The poet? Come in out of the cold," the doctor answered, unceremoniously pushing her inside the house. "Now then, what is it?"

Isabel stood shaking from head to foot and looking with excited eyes from one to the other as they pressed round her.

"David — where is David? He did not come home last night. I thought he might have been here—that you might know where he was." And at the look of astonishment on their faces she began to beat her hands together and cry out: "Oh, he is dead—he is dead!"

"No such thing," said the doctor, briskly. "He is on one of his fool-walks somewhere. Get off this child's fol-de-rols, Agnes, and make her sit down. I will fetch some wine."

Agnes gathered the frightened girl in her arms, her own face as white as Isabel's. She had to moisten her lips before she could make a sound.

"What has happened, Isabel? Tell us! Quick, dear, quick!"

"I don't know — oh, I don't know," sobbed Isabel, her terror lessening in her friend's presence. "I sat up all night thinking every moment that he must come, and he did not. That is all I know."

"Isabel," Agnes whispered in her ear, "had you said anything—anything to send him away?"

"No, no, no!" Isabel cried aloud. "Oh, I am not surprised at the thought, Agnes! A few days ago I should have supposed I had. But we have been so happy since. It is not that. He must be dead!"

"Not a bit of it," said Dr. Kilpatrick, cheerily, reappearing with a glass of wine and taking Isabel by the arm with a firm grasp. "Drink this! No —all of it. There! Now answer me. When did your husband leave you?"

"Yesterday."

"At what time?"

"Just after luncheon."

"Was he well?"

"Oh, yes! He is always well."

"Where was he going?"

"Only to the University."

"And from there?"

"He was to come back directly after his lecture. We were going to the theatre in the evening."

"And you have had no explanation of his absence?"

"Not a word."

"Not from any quarter?"

"Not a word! *Not a word!*"

But the doctor refused to be alarmed.

"Pooh, it is nothing out of the way," he insisted, brightly, patting Isabel on the shoulder encouragingly, and surreptitiously pinching Mrs. Goodwin's arm to keep her silent. "A man who can burn his hand badly and not find it out till hours afterwards does not observe ordinary rules. He is undoubtedly at the University this minute, lecturing to the empty benches under the impression that it is still yesterday. Make your mind easy, child. I will go after him myself and bring him to you in less than no time."

His assurance of manner comforted Isabel in spite of herself, and when he was gone she allowed Agnes to carry her off up-stairs and make her lie down. She was exhausted from the long vigil and suspense, but sleep was out of the question, and she rambled nervously on, pouring out to her sympathetic listener all her dread of what might have happened, and all her unavailing remorse for what had been; and so before long, quite naturally, she told the story of the burned manuscript.

Agnes gave a cry of incredulity.

"O Isabel! not that! You could not have done that!"

She was kneeling by the couch, her face pressed close against Isabel's, but in her revulsion of feeling she sprang to her feet and would have broken away only that Isabel held her fast with feverish, shaking hands.

"Yes, I did it," she said, in the strained, monotonous voice in which all her confessions had been made. "If it had been a live thing I would have done it just the same, I hated it so. I was beside myself. You don't understand. You don't know what such feelings are. You have to feel them to understand. But afterward, when he looked at me, I came to my senses, and I nearly died before him for shame and misery. You can't understand that, either. You have n't felt it."

Only the hot grasp upon her hands kept Agnes by Isabel's side. Her lips were quivering. All her face was one indignant protest.

"No, I cannot understand you," she broke out. "You do not try in the least to control yourself. You want to try only in between times when there is no need for it. You are losing power over yourself more and more. You are going backward instead of forward. It frightens me, Isabel! Oh, it is cruel to say all this to you now—just now. Forgive me! forgive me!—but it frightens me for you, Isabel! Where will it end?"

"That is what David said," Isabel replied in the same dull tone. "Only he said it differently. When he went away that night I thought he meant never to come back. But he did. And when I was quiet he talked to me for a long time. I shall never forget that talk. He told me that after just the first, when he could think it over, his horror that I could do such a thing grew to be greater than his anger, and he was frightened thinking to what lengths I might sometime let myself go. I can't

tell you all he said, Agnes. It was between his soul and mine. But he has been so gentle — so tender—with me ever since. It has been as if I were a little dying child whom he was trying to nurse back to life. It has been a heavenly week. I have never felt so near to him. And I have behaved better, too. I have wanted him to write, and to think back some of the lost poems if he could. Last night was the first time I asked him to take me out. Every other day, as soon as he came home, I let him go to work, even though I saw that the effort to remember made his head ache. He can't ever remember his own poems, you know. I tried to help him, but I —— "

" Isabel! " Agnes interrupted, her face lighting up. " The poem you gave me —— "

" Yes, yes, I know," Isabel said, peevishly. " But what is one poem out of all that are lost ? I told David you had that one. You can give it to him when he comes back. But *O Agnes*, will he ever come back ? Where can he be ? Why does he stay away ? Does n't he know it is killing me ? He is surely dead—my David! my David! "

And there her despair rushed back upon her so overwhelmingly that Agnes was terrified.

" Don't, don't, dear! He will come soon! " she kept repeating. " He is not dead. I feel that he is not dead. Dr. Kilpatrick will bring him back! "

But Dr. Kilpatrick did not bring him back. When at last the doctor returned, it was only with the information that David had not been at the University at all the day before, and that no one

knew any reason for his absence. There was not a clue to follow up. From the moment that he had bidden Isabel good-bye and had started according to his wont to walk to the city, there was not a trace of him. It was as if the ground had opened and swallowed him up when he put foot on the Avenue of Elms. Every conceivable effort was made to find him, but without avail, and as day succeeded day and no more tidings of him came than if the grave had closed over him, the most sanguine of his friends grew discouraged, and even Dr. Kilpatrick's elastic optimism failed. Isabel was frantic. She was still at Old Oaks. "I can't go home—not without David! I can't! I can't!" she had cried wildly, clinging to Agnes. "I must stay with you." And Agnes had assured her that for nothing in the world would she let her go home alone, and had held her close and tried to instil bravery into her, murmuring loving, hopeful words with steady lips that were paler than the trembling ones she kissed. Restraint had become second nature to Agnes within the last few months, and now she scarcely envied Isabel the relief of her unreserved expression. But she grew wan and white as the suspense continued, though she never abandoned hope.

"He is not dead. He will come back," she reiterated earnestly—obstinately, Godfrey thought, as he watched her with eyes made keen by love.

There was no doubt in Godfrey's mind as to what had befallen David Mulgrave. How could he have disappeared so mysteriously unless there had been

foul play? With nothing to die for and everything to live for, nothing to run away from and everything to come back to, was it credible that he should voluntarily have made away with himself? Of course some fatal accident there might have been — a misstep down an area, a knock-over by a runaway, a blow from a falling brick,— such things happen every day. But while hospitals and morgues can be searched for the unknown victims of such chances, even dead men are readily found unless there is some one interested in keeping their fate undiscovered. Agnes little guessed into what horrible places Godfrey had penetrated and how many grewsome stories he had stumbled upon in his weary search for her friend. It was not altogether for David's sake, indeed, that he spent himself in such service,—no, nor for Isabel's. When the poor girl met him with her questioning, hopeless face at the close of each unsuccessful day, breaking at his answer into a distraught cry, grieved though the warm-hearted fellow was for her, it was not Isabel whom his eyes followed as she turned away, but Agnes — Agnes, who stood always beside her, calm and reliant, encompassing her with protecting love, her lips pressed into a changeless smile, and saying over and over, till Godfrey sickened as at a refrain: "Courage, dear! He will come back soon."

But David did not come back, and the slow days struggled into seven, and a distinct impatience began to underlie the anxiety on Godfrey's open face.

"Why will she not believe that he is dead?" he said to Clara Dean one evening, having turned aside

on his way home from Old Oaks for the comfort of a few sensible words with one who always took the proper view of things. "Beyond a doubt the man has been murdered for his watch and purse and thrown into the river with a stone about his neck that he may tell no tales. But there is no convincing her. She looks me straight in the face and says very quietly: 'Surely you will not give up so soon?' till I am ashamed to do anything but keep on, though I have not a rag of hope left."

"I should think not," sighed Clara, looking at him with adoring blue eyes full to the brim with a most becoming pity. "She certainly ought to accept it by now, hard as it is, and it is quite time that she put on widow's weeds."

"Widow's weeds!" shouted Godfrey. "Oh, you mean Mrs. Mulgrave, poor thing!" he added hastily, with a queer look at Clara.

"Why, of course I do," Clara replied calmly, perceiving nothing at all queer in his look. "Whom else could I mean?"

"Nobody else, certainly," he returned quickly, the gentle immovableness of Clara's gaze seeming to demand an answer. "Nobody is to be thought of in connection with this dreadful business but poor Mrs. Mulgrave, of course. But you may take my word for it, Miss Dean, sad as it is to believe it,—David Mulgrave will surely never come back."

CHAPTER XIV

THROUGH THE MIST

Shall we see no sudden faces
Strike a glory through the mist? •
— E. B. BROWNING.

SORROW is selfish enough even in the altruistic, but in the unaltruistic it becomes rank egotism. There are no limitations to the inconsiderateness, the exactions, and the ingratitude of the selfish in times of trouble, grief being to them a license to live openly and unapologetically for themselves only. The inhabitants of Old Oaks had many illustrations of this from the hour which made Isabel their guest. During the first few days of her loss she talked incessantly of David and of their life together, recklessly betraying in every word all that she had needlessly made him endure, while covering herself with reproaches, which, unsparing though they were, Agnes could not but feel were merited. By the week's end, giving up every vestige of hope, she passed from a state of unreasoning despair into a settled melancholy and apathy still more difficult to cope with, maintaining a sullen silence for hours at a time, or speaking only to give vent to the invective against fate that is the form grief takes in the

undisciplined. She no longer left her room and would see no one save Agnes, persistently refusing to admit even Mrs. Goodwin, though well aware how annoying this exclusion was to her hostess, while Agnes she scarcely allowed out of her sight, requiring from her such continual demonstrations of sympathy that to any one else the strain would have been unendurable. But Agnes met the ceaseless demands with unfailing and loving readiness, anticipating every need. Had not David said: "Be good to her"? And was there any pleasure left greater than that of ministering to this broken life so bound with his? There had been two before to fight the battle for the poor helpless soul. Now there was but one. One against one. Could Agnes hope to win? But for his sake she would fight on still. For his sake? To do the right for his sake—was that right? Would not David himself, in the inexorability of principle and stern integrity of purpose that were the groundwork of him, say that the right was to be done for the right's sake only and not for sake of any human being?

Ah, how much easier it is to climb duty's difficult heights with love instead of law for a guide! But till that love is the love of duty and not the mere love of love, the climbing will not be bravely done nor will it lead one far. The highest heights are his only who climbs for sake of standing nearer Heaven. He who follows love is at the mercy of his leader. But he who follows duty has for his pole-star the eternal Throne of God.

To these conclusions Agnes came through the

half-conscious gropings of her mind, in the same way that after blind outreachings the struggling seed lifts its first pale spear above the ground. Souls develop slowly. There is rarely among them any miracle of growth like that of Jonah's gourd. Yet with them, as with the plant, not until they have reached the light do they visibly begin to live. So it was now with Agnes. She herself realized only that some new strength was in her to bear whatever there might be to be borne. But during the stress of those last few days her soul had grown out into the light.

It was the afternoon of the eighth day since David's disappearance. Mrs. Goodwin, chafing under the atmosphere of suspense and dread that had hung over the house for so long, now revolted openly, vowing that this life was unendurable, and that they would better all die that day and be done with it. Mr. Alden, into whose martyred ear she poured her complaints, did not know what to do with her, and being himself anxious to escape from the gloom of their environment, he finally inveigled her into the carriage for a drive, despite her vehement protestations that she did not want to drive and never would want to drive again—never would want to do anything that she had ever done before, and that of all created days this was the very worst day to choose for a pleasuring. Certainly a drearier one could scarcely have been selected. A continuous thaw had carried off every particle of snow, and the bare earth looked hard and unfeeling. There had been no sun for days, and the sky had the

infectiously depressing effect of a sullen face, the clouds hanging low with a weary air of persistence as if they meant not to lift again ever so little through all the ages to come.

Isabel, whose mental states depended largely upon atmospheric conditions, was in a mood of immeasurable melancholy, but after the carriage had driven away she fell into an uneasy sleep, clinging to Agnes like a child. Agnes continued to sit by her side in a lethargic relaxation of mind and body, the natural reaction from her prolonged nervous tension, till at last, making a great effort, she forced herself to leave the sleeper and go for the tonic of a turn in the open air. She had thrown on her scarlet coat, drawing the hood up over her head, and in the leaden atmosphere, against which the skeleton trees and bushes were silhouetted in lines of a still darker grey, the bit of brilliant colour seemed as flagrantly out of place as a poppy in a desert. The gay folds of the garment stirring about her caught her attention, and the memory of the morning when she had last worn it flashed upon her, with a vivid picture of David Mulgrave as she had seen him on that day. How tall and strong and straight he had looked, his erectness seeming less a part of his splendid physique than of the unrelaxing vigilance of a will to which his whole body responded, like that of the soldier trained in obedience to command. What exuberance of force—what a hold on life and joy his elastic step had expressed! What consciousness of power there had been in his face—what intent of fulfilment in his eyes! Agnes caught

her breath and stood still, blinded by tears that would not be beaten back.

And just then, as she looked with dim sight down the dull path stretching blankly before her like a futile hope, she saw him hurrying toward her over the brow of the hill. It was not a vision of him—not a phantom, but David himself, coming with long, rapid strides out of the lowering mist that opened sullenly to let him pass.

It was no shock to her to see him. She gave no start, uttered no cry. Had she not known all along that he would come? What was more natural than that he should be here now? Silent, swift, and straight as an arrow shot from the bow she flew to him, and, reaching him, looked speechlessly up at him, her face expressing neither surprise nor question, but only a sudden overwhelming ecstasy that left her dumb.

But the face into which she looked was strangely altered from that which a moment before she had been remembering with tears. Some extraordinary blight had passed over it, sapping it of its youth and buoyancy. It was pallid, drawn, anxious, and the eyes wore the miserable, hunted look of a man flying before an evil dream. He had bared his head as he saw her, and waited in a sort of desperate silence, only dimly conscious in his preoccupation of the rare welcome of her look.

Her eyes were too full of happiness, however, to see anything except that he was there.

"Come!" she said breathlessly, as soon as she could speak. "Come!"

David did not move, and she touched him on the arm.

"Come!" she said again imperatively. "Come to Isabel."

He shrank back, and she became suddenly aware of the misery in his face and of the underlying appeal of his look.

"Wait," he said in a choked voice. "Let me tell you where I have been."

She smiled up at him radiantly.

"Isabel must hear everything first," she said quite naturally. "For the rest of us it is enough to know that you are here. Come!"

And turning about she flew on before him, looking back ever and anon with the same exquisite glance, and so conducted him into the house and up to Isabel's room and threw wide the door.

"*Isabel! O Isabel!*" she cried from the threshold, in a voice so thrilling with triumphant gladness that of itself it told the news. Then she stood aside for David to pass, and softly closed the door upon him, and, going to her own room, shut herself in and stood utterly still, her hands clasped tightly in speechless thanksgiving.

It was long before she was quite calm. But at last she went to the window and sat there looking out into the ashen world, her soul filled with a vast content. She felt as if she could wait so for years and not weary or grow impatient. A slow wind stirred the gaunt boughs of the great oak and set the dead leaves on its lower branches trembling. Shreds of mist blew formlessly past, like ghosts of

forgotten dreams. The pulpy greyness settled closer down. Then, far off, a fog crept up out of the sea and drew stealthily across the land, inanimate and impalpable. A finger could part it, yet not all the force of all the world could stay it. It touched the horizon, and where the everlasting hills had been there was nothing. It breathed over the city, and that, too, was not. It came nearer, and all between was blotted out. Now it lay upon the lawns of Old Oaks, and drifted through the trees like smoke, and they withered from sight as the creeping silence enveloped them. No leaf rustled. No bird twittered. In the immense hush all earth's sounds were swallowed up. It came nearer still, and wound itself shroud-like about the limbs of the giant oak, and they melted away. Now space, too, ceased to be. Before the window was only a pallid nothingness, cold and lifeless and yet mysteriously alive. It seemed to breathe open as Agnes looked, lifting a little from the road beneath, then closed and fell again, taunting her with its impenetrability. And still Agnes looked out with happy eyes, and saw only that the world was fair.

Then there was a sound of hurrying feet along the hall, her door was pushed open and Isabel rushed in, her face flushed and distorted with crying, and, flinging herself upon Agnes, she broke into convulsive weeping.

"Oh, it is dreadful! I cannot bear it! I cannot!"

"Darling!" Agnes exclaimed in consternation. Isabel was trembling like an aspen leaf.

"I wish — I almost wish he had died!" she whispered.

"Isabel!" Agnes cried out. "Oh, what can be the matter?"

"I can't tell you, Agnes—not even you. I can't tell any one. I would die sooner than have any one know."

"But Isabel ——"

"*No! no!* You would feel so, too, if you knew. I have made him promise not to tell. No one has to know. He would not promise at first. But I can't have him tell—I can't! I *can't!*" Her voice went almost into a shriek. "It would break my heart." And again she burst into wild weeping.

Agnes was petrified. Why need there be any mystery? And how was an unknown crisis to be met?

"Dearest Isabel," she said at last, "whatever may have happened one thing at least is certain. It was nothing wrong—nothing to be ashamed of. And everything else can be borne."

"This cannot," Isabel wailed. "You don't know, but this cannot. It was nothing wrong, of course—that is, if what David says is true. But——"

"If what he says is true!" interrupted Agnes, indignantly. "Can you for one moment disbelieve him?"

"But I don't want to believe him, Agnes, it is too dreadful. And it is all so strange — so impossible. Indeed—indeed it would have been better if he had died. I thought he was dead. The worst was almost over. And now—O Agnes!" Her

sobs ceased and she looked up with frightened eyes. "Must I go home with him? I cannot! I don't want to!"

Agnes grew very pale. She put Isabel into a chair and knelt down in front of her, holding her firmly by both wrists.

"Is this a time to think of what you want to do? If ever your husband needed you in all his life, it is now."

"But you don't understand, Agnes! It is impossible for you to judge."

"Then tell me, and let me judge."

Isabel stiffened herself against the back of the chair like a wild thing at bay against the bars of a cage.

"No! No! Never! I will not tell *anybody! I will not!*"

An obstinate look of defiance came into her small, white, wilful face, and Agnes saw that protest was useless. A great pity filled her for this frail creature vainly at war with destiny.

"Isabel," she said earnestly, "this is not the way you greeted Mr. Mulgrave, is it, dear, with sobs and cries? However much you have suffered, he must have suffered, too."

"How do I know that?" asked Isabel, a dogged suspicion showing in her eyes. "How can I be sure that it was not all an excuse? He may only have wanted to get off by himself to write—he may not have cared to come back sooner. I have always said that he loved his writing better than he loved me. If he did not he would not have minded so

much about the burned book. He would have forgiven me sooner and not have left me to lie for hours and hours in the cold crying my heart out. I had not really meant to burn it, you know. It was only an impulse."

"But you yielded, Isabel—you burned it. And think what it meant to him."

"I can't keep thinking of it, Agnes. It would only make me miserable. And he ought to forget it, too. He ought to have put it out of his mind at once. It was wicked of him to worry about it as he did. Besides, he should have kept two copies of everything. Then it would n't have mattered. You see it was his own fault. And if I go back with him and he keeps thinking about it all the time, and—O Agnes, I can't! I *can't!*"

Agnes felt as if she were beating her head against a stone wall. Alas! the pitiful strength of weak things!

"Do you love him at all, Isabel?" she asked desperately. "Have you ever loved him? Or has it been only a pretence?"

Isabel's eyes blazed.

"How dare you say that, Agnes Alden! I love him with all my heart."

"No. Not with all of it!"

"I do!" Isabel cried passionately. "I love him with every bit of me. I love him better than I love anything on this earth!"

"Except yourself," asserted Agnes, daringly, looking her full in the face with steady, accusing eyes. "You love yourself better than you love him."

Isabel started up angrily, but Agnes held her down with both arms about her waist.

"Prove, dear, that you love him best!" she pleaded in a voice that should have drawn Isabel's soul out of her body. "Prove that you love him better than you love yourself! Show that your love is a high, unselfish, generous love—that can bear—that can suffer — can thirst and starve and be crucified for love's sake! Any one can love in words. But to love in deeds — to live out one's love! — O Isabel, it is a chance in a lifetime! Don't throw it away!"

Isabel stared at her, startled, softened, wavering.

"I — I do love him," she stammered. "I do want to prove it to him."

Agnes sprang to her feet.

"Now, Isabel, now is the time to prove it—now when he needs it most! Oh, will you? Will you be to him the sweetest—the dearest—that it is in you to be? Will you make it up to him—now that you can — for that cruel thing that you did? O Isabel, will you go home with him and show him that you can make it a Heaven?"

"Yes," Isabel breathed softly, carried out of herself by the other's impetuosity as a leaf is swept along by a current. "I will." And Agnes gave an inarticulate cry of joy.

The next moment she was standing beside David Mulgrave. He rose immediately upon her entrance, with punctilious but mechanical politeness, scarcely lifting his head, his whole attitude expressing a dejection and weariness so alien to his nature

that the change in him smote through her like a knife stab. She could scarcely frame her words.

"Isabel wants to go home with you. Will you come to her, please?"

Some new quality in her voice struck his sensitive ear. He looked at her quickly, scanning her face hungrily.

"*You* believe in me, and though I may tell you nothing?" In spite of the emphasis, his tone was without bitterness.

Agnes looked back at him with eyes in which lurked no shadow of doubt or suspicion.

"I trust you absolutely," she said with slow distinctness, and a smile that was in itself an assurance of perfect faith dawned far back in her eyes, as if it began in her heart, brightening and intensifying until it irradiated her whole lovely face.

David could not answer for something that rose in his throat, but a look that was almost joy, blent with an unutterable gratitude, swept over his haggard features. He lifted his head proudly, as if her belief in him gave him back his manhood, and, taking her hand, held it for an instant in so close a pressure that it pained her.

"Heaven has its mercies," he said as he released it. "I thank God for your friendship."

Agnes was profoundly moved. She raised her eyes once more to his, and the look that passed between them in the solemn confidence of the moment was one of those by which souls know each other.

Then they went together to Isabel.

CHAPTER XV

TIME REMEMBERED

> And time remembered is grief forgotten,
> And frosts are slain and flowers begotten.
>
> — SWINBURNE.

MRS. GOODWIN returned in high excitement. Even Mr. Alden was roused out of his usual placid indifference into something bordering upon active interest. They had been overtaken by the fog on a drive of such inconceivable dreariness as Mrs. Goodwin declared had never before fallen to mortal lot, and, turning back, had passed through Fairfields. And there, without warning of any kind, they had come suddenly upon David Mulgrave, walking home with Isabel. The surprise had been nearly too much for Mrs. Goodwin's nerves.

"What right has he to turn up in that unannounced way like a ghost?" she concluded testily, after a vivid narration of the meeting to Agnes. "It fairly froze the blood in my veins to see him. I all but smelt brimstone. Where can the man have been? Isabel refuses any explanation point-blank. It is extraordinary!"

"Is n't that just like Isabel?" chuckled Mr. Alden, hovering over the grate with one chilly foot lifted to the blaze. "To-day she is an oyster, and

if we wanted silence she would be an alarm clock in operation."

"We really ought to be told, you know," protested Mrs. Goodwin, plaintively. "Everybody will insist upon knowing what became of Mr. Mulgrave. This reticence implies some disgrace."

Agnes flushed a quivering scarlet, then held herself very straight and still.

"If Isabel is satisfied, why is not that enough for any of us to know?" she said quietly.

"Because," replied Mrs. Goodwin, sniffing irately at her smelling-salts, "all human beings — except your father—are made up of three parts of curiosity, and no earthly inquirer ever yet found 'I don't know' appeasing as an answer."

"But friends do not ask questions," Agnes said quickly. "Friends are willing to trust."

Mrs. Goodwin puckered up her mouth into a knot of wrinkles.

"Friends may be what idiots they please, my dear, but the unsentimental public usually takes it out in throwing stones; and the smallest child, you must remember, can fling a pebble that may kill a giant—let alone a poet."

Agnes turned from her aunt to her father, her repression of manner more eloquent than a spoken plea.

"Do you believe anything against Mr. Mulgrave, Pater?"

Mr. Alden drew back his foot from the fire and contemplated the sole of his shoe.

"No, my child, I do not," he answered as quietly

as she. "It would be interesting to know how he so cleverly eluded the search-parties, but I have no manner of doubt that he has entirely justifiable reasons for his silence."

"It is to be you two, then, against the world. The opposed forces sound a trifle unequal," observed Mrs. Goodwin, drily, setting down her vinaigrette with an air of placing a small gun in position.

Mr. Alden was still bending over his foot.

"We two?" he queried, raising his gentle grey eyes with a humorous glance. "Only Agnes and I?"

Mrs. Goodwin made a relenting grimace.

"Well, no," she confessed, breaking into a kindly laugh. "We shall all stand by him, of course. There is something about the man—I don't know what. One can't help trusting him,—and loving him, too, for that matter. But how can any of his friends help him if they are kept in as blind an ignorance as the crowd? Really, the Mulgraves are bound to clear up the mystery to us, at least. If there must be a secret, could we not keep it with them?"

Mr. Alden raised a blue-veined deprecatory hand.

"As if the only way not to have a thing repeated were not to repeat it oneself! Do, pray, my dear Jane, let us respect the strongholds of reserve even of our intimates. We do not demand a friend's private keys because he makes us free of his house."

Agnes listened silently, but her heart swelled with indignation against the cowardice of any friendship which could not trust in the dark as well as in the

light. Her faith never faltered for an instant, and the attitude taken by the generality of her acquaintances upon the unexplained announcement of David's return was a rude surprise to her. She grew sick over their unflattering conjectures and disparaging hints during the nine days' talk that followed. Even Clara Dean was not to be reasoned out of her suspicions.

"It is very queer, you must admit, Agnes," she said, with the straightforward look that meant an undeviating adherence to her own opinion. "It is very queer indeed—to speak charitably. Oh, of course you will not think any harm of him because he is a poet. Young Dr. Kilpatrick"—she adduced her one authority with great gravity—"says that you gauge morality entirely by epics and lyrics. But—" And a But without sequence being unanswerable, Clara felt that she had delicately gained her point.

Altogether it was an exceedingly unpleasant time for any one who had David's good name at heart. Godfrey made no comments, but his significant silence after his first long low whistle of astonishment was very trying. Dr. Kilpatrick was the only one who gave Agnes any comfort. He insisted upon regarding the matter as a joke, and made no end of fun of it; but through all his persiflage his attachment to David and his confidence in him rang true, and Agnes desired no more than that. As to David, if he suspected the disagreeable surmises circulating about him, he made no sign, continuing his daily routine as if there had been no break in it,

while Isabel was too full of her own troubles to heed anything outside of herself. Immediately after his return he called at Old Oaks to thank its inmates for their kindness to his wife, expressing his feelings in a few strong words of such keen appreciation that Mrs. Goodwin's last misgiving vanished, gratitude being so rare a quality that it is almost a guarantee of excellence in all the others. But Isabel did not accompany him.

"I cannot," she had said obstinately, when he had urged her going. "I should think you might understand that. Agnes would. Of course I am grateful to them all—I shall never forget their kindness while I live—I would do anything on earth to repay them. But they can't expect me ever to set foot again in that dreadful place where I suffered such agonies about you. Why should I? I don't want to."

This conclusive reason had closed the debate, since there is no enforcing of an obligation upon those who regulate their actions wholly by the arbitrary law of their own wishes, recognizing no duty where there is no inclination. So David went to Old Oaks alone. Agnes chanced not to be at home that morning, and she did not see him again for several weeks, as shortly afterward she was housed with a sore throat. David called two or three times to inquire for her before she was again down-stairs, but Isabel did not come, although she sent a dozen affectionate little notes expressing the most intolerable anxiety.

At last the doctor removed his embargo upon outdoor exercise, and, taking David's poem from the

drawer in her desk, where it had lain untouched since the day that it had been given her, Agnes went to Hidaway. As the maid admitted her into the artistic little drawing-room, Isabel sprang from a divan where she had been lying in a disconsolate heap with the cushions tossed about in every direction.

"O you darling!" she cried delightedly, her mobile face aglow. "You dear, beautiful darling! I thought you would never be well again! And you don't look ill one bit. I believe you have only been pretending, so that you might stay away all this time that I have been needing you. I had no idea it could be you when the bell rang. You have never come before at this hour on a Tuesday."

"No, but I want to see Mr. Mulgrave to-day as well as you," Agnes answered, throwing off her heavy wrap. "Is he in?"

Isabel's face clouded over.

"Yes. He came home an hour ago. But you don't want to see him yet, do you, Agnes? Let me have you first. It is such an age since I have seen you. I have missed you frightfully! You must n't be ill any more. Have you missed me one tiny bit? Have you? Oh, I don't believe you begin to care for me as I do for you!"

Agnes made a loving refutation of the charge, and Isabel drew her down on the divan and nestled winningly up to her.

"I can't tell you how glad I am to see you! I never knew time drag so. David is so quiet and absorbed since he came back that it is worse than having no one to talk to. I just leave him by him-

self most of the time. You can't think how dull it is for me. I can't go to Old Oaks—it would kill me —of course you understand that—and I don't want to go anywhere else, and there does n't seem a thing in this wide world worth doing. I was crying when you came in. O Agnes, what have I done that I should have to be so miserable ? "

" You don't have to be miserable," Agnes said cheerily. " No law compels any one to be that."

Isabel sat up with one of her fluttering bird-like movements.

" You don't know anything about it," she returned complainingly. " You have never had any trouble of any kind. One has to have suffered before one can sympathize with others."

Agnes took Isabel's small hand between her two, her eyes growing very tender.

" Dear, I have ever so much to learn yet. But I know positively that with courage no sorrow need make any of us utterly wretched."

" But you don't know — you don't know at all," Isabel repeated, with the conscious superiority of one who has run the gamut of earthly grief. " It is easy enough to stand outside of troubles and say what should be done, but it is very different when you are in the middle of them. It is the difference between telling a man to swim and doing the swimming.—Oh, there comes David! And I have n't had you a minute yet! "

Agnes looked up quickly as David came in. Was he so changed ? His brightness seemed rather still under some temporary eclipse, while his bearing

more than ever expressed his indomitable resolution and strength. But he had also a baffled, repulsed look, as if he had wrestled long in some unfair struggle, and her heart thrilled with pity. He had not known that she was there, and his whole manner subtly brightened as he saw her. He came up at once and sat down near her with a silent look of pleasure, not offering his hand or any word of welcome; but she did not notice the omission. There is a quality of closeness attaching to certain friendships that so bridges over their separations as to preclude the necessity for formal greetings.

"I have brought you back your poem," she said, as if continuing an uninterrupted conversation. "Isabel said I was to give it to you."

"It is better than nothing, but it will not help much," Isabel said ruefully. "It will be years now before David can bring out a new volume. You need not look so amazed, David. Of course I told Agnes all about that dreadful thing I did. I tell her everything."

"I thought perhaps — if Mr. Mulgrave would let me — that I might help recall some of the poems," Agnes went on, almost timidly, but with an intense longing in her eyes as she looked up at him. "I saw so many of them—really all, you know, Isabel, —and I have been thinking them over, and I remember ever so many bits — whole poems sometimes. If you cared to try me I am sure I could help you to get back the most of them."

"If I care to try!" David exclaimed, his face growing beautiful with a swift hope. "I cannot tell

you what the mere suggestion is to me. Everything has gone completely from me."

"You will remember — I will make you remember!" Agnes said, with a joyous assurance which was of itself an inspiration.

Isabel flung her arms ecstatically about her friend.

"O Agnes! Agnes! what an angel you are! There never was any one like you! Quick! Begin! Do you remember the one about the autumn — *Forest Vespers*? That was lovely. Do try if you can say it!"

"I think I know all of that one," Agnes said, her lips trembling a little with shyness, and the colour coming and going under her satin skin. "May I try it, Mr. Mulgrave?"

"How can you ask!" David cried. He sprang from his seat and stood before her, animated and expectant, all the depression gone out of him at the first breath of encouragement, and Agnes began at once, hesitatingly, and pausing now and then where her memory was doubtful, glancing at David for confirmation or correction, but growing increasingly confident as she the more completely forgot herself in the beauty of the words. As she finished she lifted her shining eyes to his.

"Is that it?" she asked anxiously, yet visibly pleased, like a child who knows it has recited its lesson well.

David was as if metamorphosed.

"Every word!" he exclaimed exultantly. "Quick! Let me write it down before it is gone again!"

He swept the books from a small table and brought it forward, while Isabel flew to bring writing materials.

"Now!" he urged, bending toward Agnes with a manner full of its old magnetic charm. "May I beg for it once more?"

Agnes, flushed and happy, repeated the poem again, more slowly but with additional confidence, while David's strong right hand, its shapeliness marred by a broad scar, raced over the paper with nervous rapidity. When the last word was transcribed he flung down the pen with a gay "Hurrah!" Agnes snatched it up and held it out to him.

"Go on! Go on! There are others. I know more. *The Swan Song—Jubilate*——"

He caught back the pen and dipped it into the ink with a laugh that it did her good to hear. His superb eyes flashed out light as he looked at her.

"My *Jubilate!* I have worked days over it, and I can only recall the closing line!"

Agnes drew nearer, her pulse bounding with pleasure, and began again, bending over to watch as he wrote down the lines in his clear, fine script. So she went on from poem to poem, and as she had prophesied, his memory revived under the stimulus of hers. Here he filled out a line that she could not complete, there he substituted the correct phrase for one that she had used, and farther on he recalled entire stanzas under the impetus of her prompting. Every now and then he paused.

"Are you not tired? Shall we not wait?"

But she hurried him on, impatient at interruption.

"No, no! Don't stop! There are more."

Page after page was filled and thrown aside, and still her low, rich voice kept on in its uneven cadences, supplemented every few moments by his as some hitherto forgotten passage leaped back to his mind, or broken now and again by pauses during which he wrote on as if inspired, his dark face alight with the joy of regained possession, while Agnes waited with bated breath.

"It is like digging for lost treasures," she said over her shoulder to Isabel in a happy undertone in one of these interludes. "Mines of wealth open at every step."

She had addressed Isabel in this way from time to time, receiving replies that had been full of interest at first, but that by degrees had grown shorter and shorter. Now there was no answer, and, looking round, she saw that Isabel had left her place and was sitting at the extreme end of the room with her back ostentatiously turned to them, pulling jerkily at the corners of her handkerchief.

"Isabel!" Agnes called softly, half rising in her chair.

There was no reply, and she called again perplexedly.

"Oh, you remember me at last, do you?" Isabel answered sullenly without moving.

Agnes went to her instantly.

"Dear," she said brightly, "don't sit off here. Come back! It is so much nicer having you close by."

" I prefer it here," Isabel returned, with an utter expressionlessness of voice and bearing like the hush of evil omen that precedes a storm. " Why should you trouble yourself about me at all ? "

Agnes stooped down to her.

" Are you vexed at anything, Isabel ? " she asked in a low tone.

" Vexed ? " said Isabel out loud. " Not at all. I particularly enjoy sitting stock still for hours and hours waiting for you to get ready to talk to me when I have n't had you for two minutes to myself."

"For hours and hours ! " Agnes repeated, startled.

David hastily drew out his watch and made an exclamation of dismay.

" What a shameful abuse of your kindness, Miss Alden ! Isabel is quite right to protest. I have kept you steadily at work for nearly two hours."

" But that is nothing," Agnes answered, her brow clearing. " It has not seemed ten minutes since we began, and I told John not to come back for me till half-past four. I am sorry if it has been dull for you, Isabel. I supposed —— "

" It does n't matter how bored *I* am, of course," interrupted Isabel, with lifted eyebrows and stubbornly downcast eyes. " Only I should have thought it might have occurred to you that it was just possible *I* should like to talk to you if I had the chance."

Agnes looked confounded.

" But Isabel—I should think you would be so—so glad — " She stopped, uncertain how to finish. David turned to her quickly.

"What you have done for me to-day is beyond my thanks—beyond Isabel's, too," he said with great earnestness. "Do not imagine for a moment that either of us is ungrateful!"

"I don't know why I should be grateful for neglect and unkindness," retorted Isabel, her voice full of tears. "Agnes is my friend, and she treats me as if I had no claim whatever."

"But we will have our turn now," Agnes said conciliatorily. "I do not need to go home for some time yet."

Isabel drew her thin lips rigidly together.

"I don't choose to talk now, Agnes. You could have stopped half an hour ago if you had cared in the least for seeing me. I won't submit to being taken up and dropped just as it suits people. Do not stay now on my account. You may go home as soon as you please."

"Isabel!" David exclaimed, mortified beyond endurance, the blood rushing to his face.

Agnes put her arms close round the unyielding, quivering little figure, that straightened itself defiantly against her. A wave of compassion filled her heart to overflowing. At any cost she must reach this poor self-tortured creature's conscience.

"Dearest," she murmured in her ear. "Surely you have not already forgotten your remorse over the burned poems? You cannot be really angry with me for helping to get them back."

"Oh, the poems! the poems!" Isabel cried stormily, wrenching herself away and confronting Agnes like a wild thing. "That is always how it

ends! I am always second—always! I told you long ago that the poems came first with David. Now *you* put me aside for them, too. Now *you* care most for them. I am not first ever—not with anybody. Don't touch me, Agnes! Don't speak to me! Go back to the poems if you won't go away. But I will not be ignored and set aside in my own house! I will not stay in the room with you! Don't dare come after me!" And she flung herself furiously out of the room, slamming the door to as Agnes would have followed.

David's features darkened with shame and anger as Agnes recoiled and stood looking at him helplessly, tears welling over in her eyes. He made an incoherent ejaculation, then caught himself up, waiting till he had command of himself before he spoke.

"Dear Miss Alden," he said then, "Isabel has been through a great strain and shock lately. She is still completely unstrung. Forgive her. And forgive me, too, if you can, out of your boundless goodness. In my selfish thoughtlessness I have been more to blame than she."

Agnes smiled at him through wet lashes.

"There is nothing to forgive, Mr. Mulgrave. It was my own fault for not seeing that Isabel was tired. Please do not think I mind. I love her too much not to understand her. I will come very soon again, and by and by we can finish the rest of the poems. Will you take me to the sleigh now?"

"You always understand," David answered with a troubled smile as he put her fur wrap about her.

" You see and hear and think with your heart. God bless you!"

They went out together into the clear cold of the winter afternoon. The short day was nearing its close, and from the west, out over the heavens and over the wide, fair landscape, white with a lately fallen snow, poured a magnificent crimson flood. Earth, air, and sky were all one palpitating red.

" How glorious!" Agnes exclaimed under her breath.

" It is the heart-blood of the Infinite," David said, and upon his lifted face there grew a look of sudden calm. " How all petty human crosses fall away before it! Yes, there should be in men ' a Higher than Love of Happiness.' You and Isabel have been reading Carlyle lately, I believe. Do you remember the passage ?"

Agnes finished the quotation as they walked on toward the waiting sleigh. " ' He can do without Happiness, and instead thereof find Blessedness.' Is that what you meant when you said to me once that the Lady of Shalott should have learned to do without love ?"

David turned and looked at Agnes as across the chill February air flashed a memory of their June walk through the woods, and once again all about him seemed warmth and bloom and sweetness.

" Do without love ? Did I say that ? I was mistaken. Love is giving — not receiving, and, thank Heaven, there is a whole world to love. None of us need do without love, ever."

"'And instead thereof find Blessedness,'" Agnes kept saying to herself as she drove home over the crisp, dry snow. Her lashes were still wet when she entered her own door, but her face was full of peace.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LITTLE LESS

Oh, the little more, and how much it is !
And the little less, and what worlds away !
— R. BROWNING.

EARLY the next morning Agnes received one of Isabel's characteristic notes — an unsparing self-accusation, morbid in its expressions of humiliation and despair. Agnes read it sadly enough, knowing it to be no exaggeration of Isabel's present mood, and later she answered it in person.

Hardly was she within sight of Hidaway when the front door was thrown open with a cry of joy, and Isabel, without covering and in the thinnest of slippers, flew recklessly out into the biting cold to meet her, flinging herself upon her friend's neck in a passion of tears. It was all Agnes could do to coax her back into the house.

" Darling! *Darling!* " Isabel reiterated, with an intensity which seemed as if it would burn out her soul. " Forgive me! I love you so! Oh, I love you so! "

In her penitential moods Isabel was irresistible. All that was most lovable in her was then paramount, and she was so genuinely humble-minded,

so free from self-justification, so anxious to accept her full meed of blame, that it was impossible not to try to comfort her rather than to let justice have its way. Now, at every assurance of forgiveness and continued affection, her relief could scarcely find expression, and after her first paroxysm of remorse was over she found a hundred pretty ways of showing herself as winning as she had been the reverse the day before, while even when she had quieted down and they were chatting quite as usual, her gratitude broke out ever and anon in some new demonstration.

"What should I have done if you had stopped loving me and left me to myself for good and all!" she suddenly exclaimed, leaning forward and seizing Agnes by the hand. "If you ever fail me it will be my due punishment, but Agnes, I could not bear it! I could not!"

"I will never fail you, no matter what happens," Agnes answered solemnly. "*Never*, dear!"

"I know you will not," Isabel returned, with the look of absolute trust that made it seem cruel to meet her own asseverations with lesser faith. "But I shall not put you to such a test again. David had a long talk with me last night. He was merciless. He made me ashamed of myself through and through. I shall remember what he said as long as I live. And then afterward he talked to me about his writing. He rarely does that, but I think he wanted me to understand better what his talent means to him."

"What did he say?" Agnes asked quickly, unable to withhold the question.

Isabel threw herself back on the divan and clasped her hands behind her head.

"Let me see," she answered slowly. "Art, he said, is the ideal in beauty and truth—whether it be the ideal of sight, or sound, or thought,—interpreted through the individual to the universal perception. And the interpreter, therefore, being but a mouthpiece — a revealer of truths, in however small a way,—belongs to others rather than to himself, and must produce what he has in him or be untrue to his obligations. I can't put it at all as David said it, but that is what he meant, and that is why he looks upon his writing as a sacred duty—a charge for which he is responsible. He said that when I burned his poems he felt as if I had destroyed something that he had held in trust, and as if his honour were at stake until he had recovered them. Why don't you say something, Agnes? Why are you so still? Don't sit there thinking dreadful things about me. I would rather you said them out."

She flung herself on her knees, encircling Agnes with her arms and looking up poutingly into her face.

"Agnes!" she protested. "You are not thinking about me at all! Your eyes are like stars—great far-off stars! Stop thinking about anything else, Agnes, and think of me. I would rather you thought hard things of me than that you did not think of me at all. Agnes, look at me directly and tell me that you love me better than any poem you ever read in all your life!"

She spoke in jest, but the troubled lines that had been wholly gone from her face came faintly back, and Agnes saw them with a sinking heart. With such an impressionable, uncontrolled nature as this, dared one hope that any demon was ever wholly exorcised? Isabel partially guessed the unspoken fear, and drew Agnes down to kiss her on the lips in the prettiest way conceivable.

"Don't be fancying me jealous again!" she said coaxingly. "I love those poems, too, now. I want that book of David's brought out as soon as possible, and I want you to help about it all you can. I am in earnest, Agnes!"

And, to prove her sincerity, she appointed a day for Agnes to work out the remainder of the poems with David as before, and when the time came she had a dainty little feast ready as a preliminary, and was dressed in her most charming gown, and was all devotion and eager interest. But a lost inspiration cannot be recalled at will nor by the aid of mere externals, and the result was not the same. Still the greater part of the poems was at last rewritten in this way, and afterward David added two which for strength of conception and beauty of execution surpassed the rest, and Agnes, as she read them, intuitively recognizing that they were in some way the outgrowth of his late experiences, wondered what that fiery crucible had been out of which such gold was beaten. There was no trace in them, however, of the suffering from which had come his own best illumination. David held his mission to be one of encouragement and cheer. By the

divining rod of the poet's instinct he was to reveal whatever of rare and beautiful was hidden along the common way that all were treading. He was to lift men out of despondency into hope, out of apathy into ardour, out of weakness into virility, by the contagion of a buoyant faith, stirring their consciences into that divine trouble that brings health, or luring their hearts upward into regions of illimitable light, compelling them to taste of heavenlier ethers, of purer passions and sublimer raptures than any they had yet known. How should there be room in such a song for a note of personal pain?

In a shorter period than might have been expected, David's second volume was again ready for the press, and, yielding to a sudden impulse, he stopped at Old Oaks with it on his way to the publishers. At the door Jackson informed him that the ladies had company and were in the grounds, and David was leaving without seeking them when Agnes caught sight of him from a distance and started toward him. Seeing her, he turned in her direction, and they met midway under the trees.

It was near the end of April, when everything is on the border of fulfilment, and a vague sense of expectancy thrills in the atmosphere. The foliage was at that stage of incomparably tender and peerless green that has but a single day of life between yesterday's immaturity and to-morrow's intensity, and that is to all other greens on earth what a dream of light is to the garish reality. So soft, so pellucid, so indistinct of outline the leaves were in their feathery masses, that to look through the branches

was like seeing into a green mist veined in delicate and intricate patterns, with here and there the white bloom of the dogwood blown against it like a lingering memory of lost snows.

Agnes might have been a dryad as she stood beneath the trees with a branch of magnolia blossoms in her hands. She was bareheaded, and the breeze had ruffled her loose hair into a lovely disorder, while a broad lace scarf lightly wound about her and half concealing her slim roundness, took away the effect of modern fashion from the long folds of her gown. David removed his hat and kept it in his hand as he approached.

"We are taking some friends through the greenhouses," Agnes said. "Will you come with us?"

"No, I ran in for but a moment. I will not detain you from your guests. I wanted to tell you that I am on my way to Davis & Thorne's with this." He touched the package under his arm.

Her face kindled at once.

"I am so glad! I did not believe it could be ready as soon as this."

"I felt that I must thank you again," David went on, a rare flush coming to his strong, fine face as he touched the package a second time with a quick deprecatory gesture. "It is beyond saying."

His voice was low and tense, conveying so much more than his words that Agnes listened with confused surprise.

"If it comes to gratitude —" she began slowly, looking away from him with glistening eyes as the truth, revealed by some instinctive search-light,

flashed upon her and she knew herself rich for life because of the treasures of mind and soul that he had laid open to her,—" If it comes to gratitude, what I owe you is—" Then she broke off and began again, looking straight at him with clear, candid eyes. " There can never be any debt between us. We are friends. And what friends give freely, not as a gift, but for the joy of sharing, each can accept as freely."

So the two stood for a moment, looking at each other frankly and silently, while a robin chirped above their heads, and at their feet the wind-flowers trembled in the young grass as if moved by some pale ecstasy, and all around them the soft spring-tide blossomed irresistibly on to its meridian. Then David turned and went rapidly on his way, bare-headed as long as he was in sight, and Agnes walked slowly back to her guests, still holding the branch of magnolias pressed against her bosom.

Clara Dean was of the party, and sat waiting for Agnes outside one of the conservatories on a rustic seat fitted into a clump of chestnuts, around whose base violets were standing tiptoe. She pulled Agnes down beside her, and the two sat drinking in the limpid air and chatting desultorily.

" Is n't it nice outdoors to-day!" Clara presently observed. " The air feels like satin—just like your cheeks. Do you know," she continued, looking at Agnes contemplatively, " you seem very contented lately. You have changed a great deal this last year. You look ever so much happier than you used to."

"Do I?" asked Agnes, in surprise. "I did not know it. However," she added quite humbly, "I ought to. I am happier."

"Why? Is it somebody who makes you so?" Clara inquired jealously, thinking of Godfrey.

Agnes considered, looking off into the feathery distance, her lips taking on a charming curve.

"I think," she answered at last, "it is because I am learning better what happiness is—or is not. It is not just having what we think we want."

"But we always do want what we think we want," Clara said with placid unimaginativeness. "I know I do."

"Well then, what we think we need," amended Agnes. "We do not always need what we fancy we do in order to be happy. We may have it and not be happy at all, or not have it and be happy."

"That is a riddle," Clara objected, wrinkling up her forehead. "I can't guess riddles."

"The answer to this one is simple enough," Agnes said dreamily. "Care more for being and doing than for having or getting, and you will be happy without knowing it."

"But that is a worse riddle than the other," Clara returned crossly. "If I don't know that I am happy what is the use of being happy?"

Agnes brought her thoughts back to Clara and Clara's wants, and a flash of mischief crossed her face.

"Dear," she said very softly, bending toward her, "Godfrey asked me last night why you did not wear pink oftener. He thought you looked so well in your new gown."

Clara blushed vividly, and turning, kissed Agnes blindly on the ear.

"I think I would wear that gown a great deal this season," Agnes advised soberly. And Clara wore only pink from that day on.

With the early autumn David's book came out. By his first venture he had become well enough known for the critics to be on the watch for anything bearing his signature, and they hailed it with enthusiasm. Its success was unusual and immediate, and established its author's reputation beyond further question.

In his sudden fame all doubtful reflections upon him and all disagreeable innuendoes were at once forgotten, and had he cared for it he would easily have become the favourite of the following winter's salons, the genuine interest he showed in every one whom he met and his power of lifting each to his highest level making him always a magnet in whatever circle he appeared. He punctiliously fulfilled every obligation of courtesy or of kindness with an alacrity due to that deep love of humanity which is so different a thing from the mere politeness that is its simulacrum. But the more he was courted the more he avoided the lion-hunters, and the more inexorably he claimed for himself the privilege of the seclusion that he loved.

This distaste to society endeared him additionally to Mr. Alden, whose first liking had ripened into an admiring and warmly affectionate regard, and who even brought himself at last unwillingly to glance at

the young man's poems, grudgingly pronouncing them to be of a much higher grade than he had supposed possible to any writer of the nineteenth century. He could not help surreptitiously dipping into the book from time to time afterward, though always with an apologetic scowl at his own weakness, and he was finally caught reading it aloud with a sonority of voice and gusto of declamation which betrayed a shameless pleasure in it.

"It is not bad—certainly not bad," he confessed upon that occasion, tapping the page with a caressing finger. "It is a pity the man was born so out of his time. For there never has been and never will be but one real literature—every child knows that. Even Shakespeare is merely by way of a postscript to it."

Isabel had overcome her repugnance to the associations of Old Oaks as soon as a sufficiently alluring cause for facing them had presented itself, and she and Agnes continued to meet constantly at their respective homes. But their friendship, though based on a passionate attachment on the side of Isabel and a close affection on that of Agnes, was fast becoming more of a pain than a pleasure, and but for the latter's unfailing forbearance it would have been shipwrecked many times during the ensuing year. For Isabel was steadily abandoning her efforts at self-control, and her stormy outbreaks were proportionately on the increase, until Agnes never knew at what instant the peace would be broken. It was the same scene enacted over and over with an almost ludicrous monotony, and which

any trifle sufficed to provoke. It might be but a misunderstood word, a delayed answer to a note, an imagined slight, or a fraction less than the demanded demonstration of affection, and although a vow never to offend again had scarcely left Isabel's lips, she would give way to some quick, sharp speech, following upon which, as upon the yielding of restraining gates, her anger would rush forth in a flood that nothing could stem till it had run out its course. Then came in the same inevitable wearying round, the contrition, the self-abasement, the renewed vows, all so sincere and so unavailing, and then again a brief, breathless intermission of sunshine and charm, during which Agnes took courage afresh out of her illimitable hope, and dared to believe that the past might not recur.

The bond between herself and Isabel had been at first the apparently determining cause for her friendship with David. But out of the ordinary matter-of-fact intimacy into which he and Agnes had been drawn by circumstances, was grown an unusual and beautiful relation, establishing itself by intangible processes as unself-conscious yet as resistless as those by which the tide rises or the dawn reddens or the flower opens. What his home-life was become was one of the questions, however, upon which she did not allow herself to dwell. If now and then his face was graver than its wont, it was only when he thought himself unobserved, and he maintained upon this, as upon all personal matters, a reticence which forbade questioning even to Agnes, though she was often forced to be an unwilling witness of

some scene between him and his wife which he vainly strove to avert.

For before her intimates Isabel had come to feel no deterrent shame. It was only for outsiders that she now held herself in check, her worst conduct being for those who the least deserved it and whom she loved the best; while she demanded of them in all circumstances a degree of patience, unselfishness, and generosity that she never exercised, and that she exacted most when most flagrantly outraging the commonest rules of courtesy. But that they should fall short of anything that touched herself was to transgress beyond bounds. She must be supreme with them; their first thought must be for her; her wish must be their highest obligation as well as their dearest pleasure; their sympathy must be unflagging, their loyalty to her outrank their every other loyalty, their duty to her outweigh her every duty to them.

She could never be made to believe that she did not return in equal measure the self-sacrificing devotion that she claimed. That she was capricious, volatile, swayed by every passing impulse, she admitted freely, considering that she thereby amply excused her shortcomings, and that her impetuous repentance was a sufficient atonement for any transgression. What right had they to expect her to be other than what she was made? Why did they exact so impossibly much of her? She had tried to become different, and she had failed. They ought now to take her as she was.

So, little by little, as time went by, Isabel's friends grew to rely on her for nothing and to expect

nothing of her. They continued to forgive her even beyond the Scriptural seventy times seven, making what excuses they could for her and shielding her as faithfully as at the first. But loyalty may exist unaltered side by side with a lessening affection, and insensibly there crept across their carefully guarded love some subtle and hopeless shadow of change of which Isabel herself was keenly aware and passionately resentful.

"You never understand now," she said one morning to Agnes, who had been present the day before at an outbreak with David. "You always think me unreasonable. You are grown hard with me. Can't you see that just because I love David best out of all the world it hurts most when he says anything that I don't like? That is why I get angrier with him than with any one else. He ought never to try me so. He ought to know my sensitiveness comes only from my love."

It was the same old monotonous plea. Agnes felt like one overtaken again in a returning tide. Who can beat back the waves? Of what use was opposition? Yet she stood her ground as before.

"Not from your love, Isabel. Nothing can come from love but love."

"You know nothing about it because you have never loved as I do," Isabel returned petulantly, her blue eyes dark with a sullen resentment. "If you did, you could n't help wanting to be first in all things and at all times instead of only now and then. It is n't being exacting or selfish. It is n't being jealous. It is because of my love."

Agnes seemed to feel the wash of yesterday's waters about her feet. She sighed as she made her useless dissent.

" No, Isabel. You add traits to your love that eat into it and spoil it, but they are not a part of it. Love is perfect. If we would all fill our hearts full of it there would be no room left in any of us for anything less lovely."

" I can't love more than I do," Isabel said doggedly, with a hopeless look that drew ugly lines in her pretty face. " It is only that you won't see—you don't want to see—that I love more than either you or David. If either of you really loved me you would know how I feel, and you would n't disappoint me so continually in so many little things. I never expect anything of you that I would n't do in your place. Oh, I am so unhappy all the time now—so wretchedly unhappy! It is the worst kind of pain to love people as much as I do. It would be better if I did n't care for you at all. Do you want me to stop loving you, Agnes ? Would you be glad if I did not love you any more ? " And at the bare idea she broke into an agony of weeping.

Agnes laid her hand quietingly on Isabel's head.

" Don't, dear," she said soothingly.

But Isabel missed an indefinite something in the tender voice, and sat up brusquely, looking at Agnes with searching eyes.

" You don't love me as you used to—you don't! you don't! " she declared vehemently.

She had made the same accusation a hundred

times before. But now for the first time no disavowal came.

"Agnes!" she cried out in bewilderment, incredulous of her own assertion and dumfounded by the other's mute acquiescence. "*Agnes!*" And then she grew very still all in a moment, and Agnes felt as if she had shot down a bird. She sprang up and took Isabel in her arms.

"Indeed, indeed, Isabel, I love you," she said earnestly. "I shall always love you, dear."

"Just as you used to? with the same love?" Isabel insisted with jealous intuition, looking Agnes keenly in the face, with arms tight-locked around her neck.

"I shall always, *always* love you," Agnes repeated with evasive emphasis, and closed Isabel's doubting mouth with a kiss.

Nevertheless Agnes realised with a pang that her feeling for Isabel was no longer the same and never could be the same again, since even the surest and best affection may be ground down in the end out of all likeness to itself by the continual dropping of a daily irritation upon it. The discovery made a sore spot in her heart. It was her first experience of change in what she had thought to be immutable.

"Something is troubling you," Godfrey said to her that evening, looking at her with his direct, bright glance into which had come a certain professional keenness that matured him greatly. "What is it?"

They were on a small, triangular-covered piazza

that opened out from the book-room, and that had a secluded, confidential air about it suggestive of an outdoor confessional. It was a misty evening in the early autumn, a little too chill to tempt the elders from the shelter of the house, and Dr. Kilpatrick and Mr. Alden were playing at backgammon just inside the glass door, while Mrs. Goodwin, in the comfortable security of the background, was indulging in a nap, with her mouth honestly and usefully open. Agnes sat with her hands folded in her lap, looking off into the soft greyness of the night, while Godfrey looked at her. He thought she had forgotten his question, it was so long before she answered.

"It is not easy to put it into words," she said at last. "But I find that feelings alter independently of one's will. I had fancied that they could not. It gives me a curious sense of rudderlessness, as if I were at the mercy of outside chances. I do not like it."

"All feelings do not change," Godfrey said quietly, thinking of his love for her.

"Ah, but they do," Agnes returned, thinking of her love for Isabel. "It is the inevitable law. Nothing is stationary. Everything either grows or decreases. And when a friendship decreases, it is a withholding, a retracting—contracting—that causes actual physical pain. It is a sort of dying."

"But the other kind — the feeling that grows?" Godfrey asked tentatively.

Her face brightened and sweetened. She got up and went to the edge of the piazza where it jutted

out upon the terrace, and stood there shadowy as a white cloud against the darkness.

" In a friendship that grows," she said, speaking out softly into the night as if thinking aloud, " all is an unconscious outgiving and gathering in, just as a tree drinks life in at every pore and opens leaf by leaf without knowing whether it is giving or receiving. Only there is conscious growth in it and a feeling of being raised and sustained in some element not one's own. For one lives not one's own life only but the friend's life, too, gaining all the interests of that other life, and so thinking new thoughts, reaching to new ideals, new comprehensions, new sympathies, overstepping one's own limitations on countless different sides. I used to wonder how a bird felt when it first found itself flying through the air. Now I think that perhaps we feel that way when we are lifted above ourselves on the wings of a friend's thought."

Godfrey came and stood beside her, looking off as she was doing into the starless night. The light, streaming through the door from the book-room, fell in a lessening glow across the piazza and lost itself a little way out upon the road. Beyond the driveway the trees stood up stiff and still, their brilliant hues reduced by the dark to a uniform dull purple, against which here and there a maple lifted a pallid face or a white-limbed birch showed naked and cold, while a vaporous breath stole ghostily out from their branches and floated indistinguishably away like an escaping soul.

" You know," Godfrey said a little unsteadily,

seeing only his great desire staring back at him from the dark, " such a friendship as that between man and woman can come to but one conclusion—to love."

Agnes moved slightly. Godfrey could not see her face distinctly in the half light, but he heard the change in her voice.

" No, oh no! I was speaking merely of friendship —not at all of love."

" But the highest love is both love and friendship."

" Yes, of course. But I am talking only of friendship—the friendship that can lead to nothing except always to a higher, nobler friendship."

" Is it of your friendship with Miss Dean that you are thinking ? " Godfrey asked maliciously.

Agnes felt herself flush scarlet and then grow pale. She waited an instant before answering, but her voice kept its even tone.

" What I mean is true of all friendships. With each friend one gains all that that friend has to give."

Godfrey suddenly caught her hand.

" Agnes—take what I have to give you—take all of it! not friendship only, but love, too! "

Her slender, cool fingers closed tranquilly over his.

" Only your friendship, Godfrey. You know it can be only that ever."

" But if friendship means so much to you, why will you not let love mean more ? " he pleaded, and, catching her by the other hand, he turned her toward

him. "Agnes, I have been patient for so long—I have waited over two years to ask you again! Did you think I had forgotten? I shall never forget. I only waited because I saw that you had not come to care yet. But do you not feel differently now? Cannot you love me now? You said yourself that feelings alter."

She stood quite still, facing him, making no effort to free herself, but her calm was like a stone wall between them.

"I did not mean it in that way. Feelings alter only in degree, not in kind. I can never change so. Dear Godfrey, will you not be content to be my friend?"

"How can a man content himself with less when he wants infinitely more?" Godfrey burst out passionately. "Why will you be so adorable if you do not want me to love you? Agnes—if you had any idea of what love is—of the torment of it—the hunger and thirst of it ——"

"I do know," she said very slowly. "Love is to want to have. But friendship is to want to give. Friendship is love grown unselfish. It is a higher passion than love. One should be able—when one must—to raise love into it. Godfrey,"— she looked into his clouded face with a wistful smile,—"you are my oldest friend of all. Be always my friend; but find another woman to love."

Her quiet self-possession was altogether different from the trepidation with which she had met his avowal so long before, and his hope faltered. This was no frightened girl. This was a woman twice

worth the winning that she had been then, but a woman as fully aware of her own mind and as tenacious of will and purpose as he was. He dropped her hands with a sigh, and to them both the evening felt suddenly chill and desolate. In the silence they heard a dead leaf rustle by along the gravelled road. Something seemed passing out of their lives never to return. With a common impulse they moved toward the door.

"Come in—come in, children," called Dr. Kilpatrick, cheerily, as he looked up from the board. "It is too cold for you out there any longer, and we need you. Jeff and I are on the verge of a duel. He throws nothing but doublets."

"There is another," chuckled Mr. Alden, lifting his dice-box. "Upon my word, Matt, I believe they are loaded!"

Godfrey held the door back for Agnes to pass through, and as she went by him she paused imperceptibly. He met her mute appeal with a faint smile.

"I shall not look for her yet, Agnes. I can wait still."

CHAPTER XVII

THE EDGE OF DOOM

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

— SHAKESPEARE.

ALTHOUGH Isabel had expressed herself satisfied with the assurance that Agnes gave her, the evasion of any direct reply to her question haunted her memory irritatingly, and she had ample time for brooding over it during the next three weeks, for which time she was confined to her room with a severe attack of neuralgia. She had had few illnesses in her life, and, like most people, was the more intolerant of pain because of her customary freedom from it, and Dr. Kilpatrick found her an exceedingly rebellious and difficult patient.

This attack was of much longer duration than the one for which he had originally been called to attend her, and, during its slow course, he gained an insight into the family life at Hidaway that completely changed his preconceived ideas. Until now he had known only Isabel's best and most fascinating side, but in that behind-the-scenes knowledge that unmasks so many parquet illusions, and that is vouchsafed to physicians as to few other of life's

onlookers, his estimate of her underwent a radical change, and the better he came to know her the more he marvelled at David's patience. Did it spring wholly from love, or was it partly pity for so weak a nature, and partly a conscientious fulfilling of every smallest duty in compensation for a waning affection? Was it conceivable that any man's love could endure through such an incessant strain? The doctor, in common with Mr. Alden, had come to feel a very real admiration and liking for David, and many a time as he drove away from Fairfields, he thought what a shame it was that so fine a man should not have married — well, not Agnes, of course, since she was to marry Godfrey by and by, and the sooner the better now, but some sweet, womanly young creature with all of her characteristics. That would have been the ideal marriage for him. But how seldom any marriage fulfils its early promise! And the doctor heaved a sigh which he would surely have recognized as retrospective had he thought fit to analyze it.

Did David still love Isabel? Dr. Kilpatrick pondered not a little over the question, and his manner to David grew more and more affectionate. There are other bonds of friendship than those of pure congeniality. One may come actually to love a man for a hundred insignificant reasons, or for no better one perhaps than only because in some great lottery he, too, has drawn a blank.

However, even Isabel's lynx eyes could find no particle of evidence that David's heart was less completely hers than in the early days of their

marriage. There was no reason whatever why they should not be as happy now as they had been then. Where was their happiness gone ? Or, rather, where was hers gone ? David lived on a plane above the influence of surroundings. Nothing could reach him to make him permanently miserable. Even the memory of that terrible time of which they never spoke seemed to be wholly banished from his mind. It was agreed between them not to mention it, but did he never think of it ? If he did, how could he keep that high, calm, bright spirit of his undisturbed ? And why did she need to be unhappy ? She had a fretful consciousness that she was the only one to blame for their increasing differences, and that these sprang from utterly inadequate causes. She was like one in a garden wantonly plucking its flowers, and then grieving over the barren stalks. What if some day she should waken to find herself in a desert of her own making ? Already Agnes, though unfailing in gentleness and sweetness, had come to love her less. Isabel was sure of it. Mrs. Goodwin had long ceased to make any pretence of continuing the affectionate interest that she had been so prodigal of at first. Clara Dean would have nothing at all to do with her. And now Dr. Kilpatrick, who used to laugh and joke with her, did nothing but scold her and bid her behave herself, and that in no playful or gentle terms. They were all hard on her. They all expected impossible things of her. And life was a torment.

She felt a little more cheerful, however, one morn-

ing during her convalescence, as she sat in her room arranging a bowlful of Parma violets sent her from the Old Oaks hothouses. David came in to take leave of her before starting for the University, and stood watching her.

"No one arranges flowers as you do," he said, as she finished her pretty work and set the dish aside. "You have an inimitably artistic touch."

She smiled up at him, well pleased, and, taking his hand, held it against her cheek in her old loving way while they talked over those important little routine nothings that serve as screws to hold the machinery of life together. It was long since they had had so amicable a discussion.

After he had left her and while he was still in the hall below, she espied a book that he had forgotten, and called her maid to take it down to him. Her eyes chanced on the violets as the girl came in, and she snatched out half a dozen from the bowl, ruthlessly spilling them all out in her haste to disentangle the long stems, and, wiping them on the daintiest of handkerchiefs, she hurriedly made them into a *boutonnière* for David, and gave them to Anne to carry down with the book. Then she rearranged her spoiled bowl, and found that she could not do it nearly so well the second time; success, like lightning, seldom strikes twice in the same place. But she consoled herself by picturing the little bunch on David's breast, reminding him of her every time its appealing breath stole up to him. It was not often of late that she had favoured him with such little wifely attentions. This one would please him

the more. After all, life was not wholly wretched yet. And why should not all go differently from this day ? Why should she allow anything ever to come again between herself and David ? Why should she not be always sweet and loving to him as she had been that morning ? It would be easy to be so now that her neuralgia was gone; virtues are easier in health than in illness. Yes, she would make him full atonement in the future for the past.

It was with a heart overflowing with good resolutions that later she went down-stairs to her solitary luncheon, and as she passed through the hall she caught sight of a tiny bunch of violets lying limp and forlorn on the table. She went up and looked at it, and her face turned hurt and hard. It was the *boutonnière* she had sent down to David that morning.

So that was what he had done with it ! He had left it there like a thing of no account. True, it was not much—only half a dozen violets — but she had spoiled all her pretty work just to get these for him. Besides, it is not its intrinsic worth but the sentiment that prompts it which gives any offering value. Why could not David have worn it for her sake ? He would never have left it here if he still loved her. No, he had ceased to care for her. His writing was become all in all to him, as she knew it would. He thought of nothing else — cared for nothing else. She was a cipher in his life. He could not even remember to wear her flowers. Snatching up the bunch, she opened the front door and flung it out. It should lie in the way of his

feet when he came back, that he might crush it as he had crushed down her love.

She ate scarcely a morsel of the tempting meal with which the servants tried to coax her fitful appetite. How could she eat when David had ceased to love her? She soon threw down her napkin and went back to her own room, and cried herself into a return of her neuralgia, and felt that the earth did not hold a more ill-treated and heart-broken woman.

Some glimmering consciousness of the disproportion between her grievance and her despair kept her from narrating the incident to Agnes, who called in the afternoon to talk over the details of a large reception which it was proposed to give at Old Oaks in the course of a few days. Nor when David returned, would she vouchsafe him any explanation of the changed mood in which he found her. If he could not trace it to its source, it showed how little he minded hurting her. He had come home expecting to find her winsome as he had left her, and her unsmiling, cold greeting was a disappointing surprise. She would not look at him nor answer him save in monosyllables, while to emphasize her manner toward him, to every one else, including the servants, she was unusually gracious.

Long experience had taught David the futility of either cajoling or coercing her in her tantrums, and after his first vain attempt to obtain a reason for her displeasure, he made no effort to propitiate her, leaving her sulky silence unnoticed, and continuing to act as if all were in perfect accord between them. For two days she maintained this hurt and rigid

attitude, but by the third morning she wearied of keeping up the single-sided quarrel. David chanced to come down-stairs with a headache, and the rare occurrence serving as a needed excuse for the softening of her feelings, she came at last to kneel by his sofa and sob out her trouble.

David pushed back the handkerchief from his forehead and sat up as he listened, and when she had finished, to her amazement and indignation he broke into a laugh.

"And it is for this fancied crime that you have treated me like a felon all these days? I did not know that you had sent me down any violets. Anne said nothing about them."

Isabel stopped crying in sheer amazement.

"O David! You did not forget them? And I have suffered this agony all this time for nothing!"

"Quite for nothing," David answered a little grimly, smoothing down his heavy hair with both hands where the bandage had rumpled it. "There was no cause for self-torture in any case."

"Not even if you *had* forgotten my flowers?"

"No, not even on that unlikely supposition."

"Don't take it so lightly, David. It is vital to me," Isabel said with quivering lips, rising to her feet and moving back from him. "It does n't mean only whether or not you might have forgotten the violets. It means whether or not you love me as you used to."

David got up impatiently and walked to the window, then turned and came back to where she stood.

"Why will you try to make mortal wounds out

of pin-pricks?" he said gently. "Don't let us waste breath discussing imaginary nothings."

"That is always the way you answer me," Isabel cried. "Everything that hurts me is always 'imaginary.' You don't choose to see how real it is to me. David, I *will* be answered. I won't be put off by everybody. Do you love me as much as you used to,—as much as you did when we were married? You *must* tell me, David!"

David did not answer immediately. He stood looking over her head into the distance, an enigmatical but strangely tender expression growing upon his face. Whether he were thinking of their past, or thinking of her at all, Isabel could not tell. Presently he brought down his eyes to the level of hers, yet still she did not know, even though she seemed to see through them into his soul.

"The love of a man for his wife after eight years of marriage," he said slowly, "ought to be as infinitely beyond his first ignorant, romantic adoration of her as daylight is beyond candle-light. By that time she should have become so a part of him that it would be as impossible to measure his feeling for her as to define the nature of his feeling for himself. They should have grown so close that no separation could actually part them. The days before he loved her — before he knew her — should have become to him as the days before he was born,— a time of unmemoried, insentient growth. And in the days since, his love, shaping itself by all that is most inspiring in her, — unconsciously fitting itself for highest companionship with her,— should have

purified itself from all baser elements of passion, and risen with hers into that lofty and pure unity which is the soul's only true mating."

Isabel was looking at him intently, and suddenly she saw a recognition of her look cross the glory of his eyes like a shadow. He stopped short, and instantly she knew that his thought had not been of her nor of their love, but only of love as she had not taught it to him,—of love as it should have been and might have been for them both. A stinging sense came over her of an ideal that she could have realized, and of a loss that was a consuming shame. She said not a word; her face turned a dull, toneless red; her eyelids fell; and, going slowly out of the room, she went up to her own chamber, and bolted herself in.

When later David knocked at her door to bid her his usual good-bye, she would not open to him nor answer him, though he called many times and each time more kindly, and at last he went away. He tried to think how he could have offended her so soon again, but his head ached, and he gave up the attempt. It was a November morning, sunless and sombre. The world wore the desolate, forbidding look that it wears at no other time of the year. The bare boughs creaked despondently in the wind as he turned down the denuded Avenue of Elms, and the dry leaves cracked beneath his tread, or fluttered fitfully before him, ugly and shrivelled, with a spasmodic scraping sound that jarred upon his nerves. What was become of his usual sustaining delight in Nature's every mood? The universal

colourlessness chilled him to the marrow. The tiny, dreary, irregular noises irritated him. He could not shake off the feeling that he was walking toward a dense blank cloud that was presently to descend upon him and blot out all his light.

"It is November," he said to himself with a shiver. "November—the last of months to be born in, and the month of months to die in."

CHAPTER XVIII

A SOUND OF REVELRY

There was a sound of revelry by night.

— BYRON.

IT was the evening of the following day, and, though outside it was bleakest November and night, within the substantial walls of Old Oaks it was midday and June.

Old Oaks had always been a hospitable house, but in a quiet, exclusive style that scarcely encroached upon its beloved privacy, welcoming its friends and spending itself whole-heartedly in their service, with no thought of any wider obligation of entertaining. Not since the young wife's death had its massive doors been thrown open on so extensive a scale as that now planned by Mrs. Goodwin. Mr. Alden had held out strenuously against the innovation, but to his most formidable arguments his audacious sister-in-law had spiritedly opposed an equally unanswerable set, and the resulting deadlock had only been broken by her craftily enlisting Agnes on her side. At a single word from his daughter Mr. Alden's best defences had melted away into thin air, and Mrs. Goodwin had forthwith proceeded with her preparations, and to such purpose that when all

was in readiness he was compelled reluctantly to admit that Old Oaks had never appeared to better advantage.

"I grant that there can be nothing more fit than a mansion apparelled in this fashion to do honour to its intimates," he conceded. "It is like a girl adorning herself that she may look fair in the eyes of her lover. But a woman who decks herself not for the chosen one but for the common herd—who dons her jewels and her pomp that the entire gaping crowd may ogle and jostle her and besmirch her with its worthless praises—pah! The first is the sacramental vesture of the bride; the other is nothing but the shameless display of the wanton."

"Jefferson!" expostulated Mrs. Goodwin. "What an outrageous comparison!" And Mr. Alden calmly rejoined that if he were not free to select those whom his soul delighted to honour, he must at least claim the privilege of choosing his similes.

Even in its gala dress Old Oaks preserved its distinguishing characteristic of rich simplicity, every decoration appearing an outgrowth of the building's original purpose. The vestibule was an enclosed garden through which the way led into the great domed hall, dimly lighted and dressed with cedar trees and heavy evergreen garlands, admirably suiting its sombre stateliness. The flower-decked rooms that opened out on either side were dazzling, the great mirrors and crystal chandeliers flashing back light from myriad points, and the statues standing out with an added lustre of whiteness against backgrounds of living green. The musicians were

hidden by a screen of palms in the gallery of the central hall, and the harmonies that floated through the rooms below appeared to come mysteriously from nowhere and to penetrate everywhere, as if the air breathed music. Beyond the state apartments were the anterooms and conservatories, hung with shaded lamps that toned each to a different and delicious colour, and lovely little loitering places made to lose one's heart in, where one fancied that echoes of the old, old story lingered, making the whole beautiful illuminated house seem but a romantic and tender setting for a love idyl.

Now it was eight o'clock, and Agnes, looking like a tall white lily, came down to the reception-room, where her father and aunt were awaiting her. Mr. Alden, standing with his hands clasped behind his back in an attitude of bored resignation, turned his mild eyes dejectedly in her direction as she entered. Her coming was the signal that what he called the abomination of desecration was about beginning. Mrs. Goodwin, her aristocratic ugliness resplendent in *moiré* and diamonds, called her up peremptorily to examine the details of her toilet, from her slender slippers to her mother's wedding pearls that encircled a throat no whit less round or smooth than they.

Agnes paused in the centre of the room, tossing out the train of her satin gown, and lifting her head to meet her aunt's scrutiny with a little embarrassed laugh. She had glanced at herself in the wide mirror in the hall as she passed, and she could not help guessing that she was fair, though in the becoming

candle-light that touched up the gold tints in her rich tresses and brought out the flower-like texture of her skin she was fairer still. There was a tint under her transparent cheeks like the flush at the heart of a white rose, and beneath her dropped lids a radiance shone through her thick lashes like a light through a silken fringe.

"Humph!" pronounced Mrs. Goodwin, non-committally, but with an intonation of indubitable satisfaction. "What do you say, Jefferson? Could she be more bride-like if this were the sacramental vesture you alluded to?"

"I never saw her look happier," Mr. Alden said in plaintive reproach. "Is it possible the child really enjoys this sort of thing?"

"Indeed I do!" Agnes laughed. "I like the idea of dispensing largess royally. My conception of hospitality has widened. I never realized before that I owed anything to any one except to my particular friends."

"No more you do," declared Mr. Alden. "Homes are sanctuaries — not public foraging grounds. A mob is no less a mob for being in broadcloth and silk. I wish myself well rid of this one."

"Bear up! Bear up!" said Mrs. Goodwin, encouragingly, tapping him on the arm with her fan. "Deliverance will come by eleven o'clock."

"True, it can't last for ever," Mr. Alden reflected, with returning patience. "The impermanence of things terrestrial is a consoling thought. Ah, there comes Godfrey,—and without his mother! Jane,

if that woman stay away to-night, I will forgive you the party!"

But Mrs. Kilpatrick was coming later, Godfrey promised reassuringly, and Mr. Alden's spirits sank again to zero. Godfrey had merely driven out ahead for the pleasure of a few words with his hosts and a peep at the house before the arrival of the crowd, and he soon carried off Agnes for a tour of inspection.

She hurried him from room to room. Carriages were already driving up to the house, and she had to be back at her post before the guests descended from the dressing-rooms. In the meantime she was delighted to be Godfrey's cicerone and to call his attention to some of the less obvious beauties of the decorations, and he followed her about with an enthusiasm equal to her own. He had never seen her so radiant or so glowing with anticipation, and he longed to detain her under the soft rose lights of a fascinating little side-room where she paused to point out a seat fashioned like a natural moss-bank. But she drew him ruthlessly on.

"Aunt Jane is calling. I must go back. First, though, we will peep into the dining-room."

She hastened on to permit him an appreciative glimpse of the long banquet table standing ready in lavish and splendid state. But there were steps upon the grand stairway now and the rustle of sweeping skirts, and Agnes was about to fly back to the reception-room when Jackson pushed his way to her through a group of serving-men.

"If you please, Miss, I said you should n't be

disturbed, but the boy who brought this says he was n't to go back nohow without an answer."

He held out a salver on which lay a note addressed to herself.

"Agnes!" came anxiously from the adjoining room in Mr. Alden's voice.

"Yes, Pater! Instantly!"

She caught up the note and tore it open. It contained only half a dozen blurred lines. As she read them she shrank as if she had been struck a blow, her face blanched, and all the sunny light went completely out of it, leaving it blank and scared. Godfrey came close and took firm hold of her arm. He thought she was going to fall.

"Agnes! Agnes!" came impatiently from the threshold.

"Yes! Yes, Pater!" she answered, in tones to which she vainly endeavoured to give the happy ring of a moment before. Then she looked over her shoulder at the waiting servant. "Tell the boy to say that I will come the first moment possible."

Mr. Alden was hurrying toward her across the room. She threw Godfrey a glance so full of dread and pain that it wrung his heart, and thrust the paper into his hand.

"Bring it to me — by and by — when you have read it. Pater, darling, I am coming!"

She drew herself up bravely, summoning back what she could of her old grace and brightness and forcing her lips into a smile, and so went to her waiting duties. Godfrey, watching her as she passed to the sound of gay music down the brilliant flower-

wreathed rooms, thought incongruously of a victim going to the stake. His anxious eyes followed her till she was out of sight. Then he turned to the sheet he held for an explanation.

"Come to me Agnes,—"he read. "Come at once—I cannot bear it any longer—David went away yesterday morning — He will never come back—He has deceived me—I have found it all out—I am the wretchedest woman alive—I will tell you everything — *Come instantly* — I cannot endure it another moment—"

There was no signature. The irregular sloping lines broke off with a long downward stroke and a blot where the pen had dropped from a nerveless hand. Godfrey's face darkened. He stuffed the note into his pocket and wandered aimlessly about the fast-filling rooms, trying to think out the puzzle.

So Mulgrave had disappeared again, and this time apparently for good and all. What the mischief was at the bottom of it? Trouble with that tormenting little wife of his? Business complications? Rascality? Godfrey revolved in his mind one hypothesis after another, dismissing each as untenable. But what reason then could there be? And why had the news affected Agnes to such a degree?

He returned to the reception-room and stationed himself where he could watch her at her post by Mrs. Goodwin near the entrance. But there was no trace now of distress or anxiety in her animated face and bearing. Nothing could be more perfect than her greeting of her guests. She had the same

unaffectedly charming welcome and cordial smile for each, and for each she found exactly the right word. There was no evidence that she was holding herself under any sort of check. She was to all appearances absorbed heart and soul in the pretty duties and pleasures of her rôle. Only, watching with the perfected vision of an enlightened sympathy, Godfrey presently detected what no other observer noticed,—a swift, impatient glance that swept the room searchingly every few seconds. He moved within its range, and the instant her eyes fell upon him he knew that he was the one she sought.

"Come!" her glance said imperatively.

Godfrey obeyed immediately, working his way to her in a roundabout fashion through the crowd and pausing to speak with one or another as he went, and stationed himself behind her to wait an opportunity to speak, noting admiringly the steadiness of her voice and the personality she put into her greeting of each comer in turn. It was some time before she was free to address him, but finally the chance came. She turned to him instantly. Her face still wore its mask of radiant brightness, but as her eyes met his there leaped up in them a look so frightened and despairing that it amazed him.

"Godfrey," she murmured breathlessly, "it will be so long before I can go,—could you,—would you go to her?"

The supplication of voice and manner was almost irresistible, but something rose stubbornly in Godfrey's throat. Her fear seemed to be for Isabel, yet that grief-stricken look he felt was not for Isabel

only. He could not meet it. His eyes fell and his face hardened.

" There is no particle of use in my going without you," he said in a gruff undertone. " She would not confide in me. I could do nothing."

Then her attention was claimed and she moved hastily away, a trifle paler than before and breathing unevenly, but with no other sign of her absorbing anxiety. Godfrey lingered near uncomfortably, and before long she turned to him again and the words came stumbling out under her breath.

" I *must* get to her—to-night—the first instant I can. Father—Aunt Jane—they will forbid it. Will you help me ? "

Mrs. Goodwin and several others noticed the girl's impulsive movement toward the young man, and, construing it according to custom, smiled interestedly and significantly. Agnes was too full of agitation to heed, but Godfrey saw and understood. It was galling. He had never felt her so immeasurably removed from him as at that moment when she appeared nearest.

" You shall go," he said shortly. " I pledge you my word. You shall go as soon as this thing is over."

He made her a stiff little bow as he spoke, and, leaving her abruptly, went into another room and devoted himself assiduously to Clara Dean for the rest of the evening.

How the dreadful hours passed Agnes scarcely knew. The music became a single discordant note sounding leagues away, the voices a continuous

hissing murmur, the flowers meaningless blots, and the lights an increasing power for revelation turned glaringly in on her soul. She must not betray herself. She must hold herself well in hand. She must not allow herself to think. She must force herself to remember only that she stood here by her aunt to help make these people glad that they had come. Yet all the time, while Mrs. Goodwin and Mr. Alden were growing momently more proud of the gracious young hostess for whom they were receiving so many compliments, she was feverishly counting off the departures and saying exultingly to herself: " One more gone. One less now to keep me back."

By eleven o'clock the rooms began to empty, and at last, save for the Kilpatricks, the doctor having come only to escort home his wife, all the guests had left, even those privileged to outstay the throng. As the last gleaming gown swept through the doorway, Agnes felt as if prison bars were breaking before her. At the instant Godfrey stood beside her.

" My father will drive you over in my trap. He and I will arrange it with Mr. Alden while you get ready."

" I am ready," Agnes said quickly. " I have only to throw on a cloak."

Godfrey glanced vindictively at the toilet in which she looked so lovely.

" You have to change that ball-gown, of course."

Agnes could scarcely keep from stamping her foot. Every second her self-control was growing more difficult to maintain.

"What matter what I have on? Don't make me lose time! Let me start at once!"

"You can't go in that rig," Godfrey said imperturbably, firm in the cause of common-sense. "Get ready while I see your people about it."

She, too, threw an angry glance down over her gown. She could have torn it into shreds for delaying her. Then yielding rebelliously to the inevitable she turned and flew up the broad stairway, pulling off her long gloves and tugging at her pearls as she went. Reaching her room, she dropped off her trailing skirts, threw on whatever was nearest to hand, flung a cape over her bare shoulders and satin waist, and was down-stairs again sooner than seemed possible. Godfrey met her in the hall.

"I had the dickens of a time with them," he said, jerking back his head in the direction of the reception-room. "They can't see any more than I can why you have to go to Fairfields at this hour of night. However, they have consented to let my father take you."

"And the carriage?" Agnes asked breathlessly, ungratefully oblivious of everything but her haste.

"It is at the door."

She was turning toward it impetuously when Godfrey laid a vexed hand on her arm.

"Can't you at least speak to your father before you go?"

Agnes blushed scarlet.

"I—I was forgetting," she said humbly, turning obediently to the reception-room, and all her gentleness and sweetness came suddenly back to her.

"Dear Godfrey, you have been very kind! I thank you."

But Godfrey's face did not clear. A little later he followed her out to the front porch, where his father's coupé and his own phaeton were the only remaining carriages, pushed past the waiting men, helped her into the low wagon, tucked the robe closely about the slender feet still in the white slippers she had not thought to change, gave the reins into his father's hands and watched the two drive off—all without a word. Then he viciously kicked out a crease in the red carpet that covered the steps and went back in search of Mrs. Kilpatrick.

The lights were still burning brilliantly; the flowers still flooded the rooms with fragrance. But the music had ceased, and a vast hush like the quiet of utter relaxation had taken its place. The great house was as if fallen asleep and dreaming happy dreams of a finished pleasure.

CHAPTER XIX

AN EMPTY GLASS

Turn down an empty glass

— OMAR.

FEW words passed between Dr. Kilpatrick and Agnes on their way to Fairfields. He was instantly aware of a tenseness in the motionless young figure by his side, which increased with every revolution of the wheels and which surprised him into pondering silence. Was it for that trying Isabel that Agnes was in such anxiety? The night was very dark. He could barely make out her features in the chill gloom, but her attitude, as she sat on the extreme edge of the seat, all her body inclining forward, was that of an overmastering impatience, and the kindly doctor allowed the mare to start off at a pace that he would assuredly have condemned had any one else been driving.

They soon reached the point where the lane branched off from the main road, but the doctor did not turn into it, and Agnes caught at his arm in a tremor of distress.

"Oh, you are going the wrong way — the long way!"

"The long way is the short way at night, my

dear," he answered sagely. " That lane is a death-trap in the dark."

She made no answer, but he felt her shrink back and stiffen in the effort not to remonstrate. He touched the mare with the whip, and the light wagon went flying along with a fine disregard to ruts and stones.

When they had gone about three-quarters of the distance at a quite mad pace, she turned to him with a swift, irrepressible movement.

" Could n't we go a little faster, please ? "

" Certainly we could," he returned cheerily, " if this beast were only a locomotive instead of a race-horse."

Again Agnes made no reply, but he shrewdly suspected that under the shelter of her cape her hands tightened their grasp upon each other. And again he wondered.

It was midnight when they drew up at Hidaway. Agnes was out of the phaeton and half way up to the house almost before the doctor had alighted. The leafless maples no longer made a defensive screen for the pretty cottage. In defiance of its name it was now plainly visible from the street through a network of gaunt branches that, like thin fingers held before a face, appeared trying still to shield it from public gaze. Lights shone out from all its windows, and hardly had her foot touched the veranda when the front door opened and a maid looked anxiously out, uttering a cry of relief at sight of her.

" O Miss Alden, I am so thankful you have come! The Madam has given over asking for you."

Agnes hurried into the house and threw a rapid glance around.

"Where is she?"

"In her own room, Miss."

"I must go to her."

The maid stood imploringly in the way.

"O Miss, have you no news of the Master?"

Agnes shook her head.

"Have you heard nothing, Mary?"

"Nothing since the letter, Miss."

"The letter!" Agnes cried. "He has written?" She turned eagerly to the doctor as he hurried in after her. "O Dr. Kilpatrick, there is a letter!"

The doctor passed his hand through her arm, drawing her back as she would have flown to the stairs.

"Wait! Let Mary tell us what she knows before you go to Mrs. Mulgrave."

"But, Sir, I know nothing," the maid said in distress, "only the Master never come home last night, and the Madam was nearly distracted, and this morning she had a letter."

"From Mr. Mulgrave?"

"Yes, Sir. Leastways, 't was his writing on the envelope."

"Did you see the postmark?"

"Yes, Sir. 'T was just from Battleborough, and it had only her first name to it. And after the Madam had read it she cried out that she wished he was dead—that she could not abear it—no one could abear such a thing. We was out of our wits trying to quiet her. Then of a sudden she turned quite

still and resolved-looking, and told Anne to get her things to go out. And when she came down I asked if I might n't go with her, and she answered very quick: ' No one shall go with me. I am going to see *him*,' she said. And she walked straight out of the house—that was this morning, Sir, at ten o'clock, and she never come back till six of this evening, and when I let her in—O Sir, she looked awful! And I said: ' Did you see the Master, Madam ? ' And she looked fierce at me, and says she, very proud: ' No, I made a mistake. He was n't there,' says she. And she would n't have nothing to eat, and went up to her room, and threw herself on the floor, and cried, and cried, and cried, till all our hearts was broke. And 't was then she said she must see you, Miss, and she wrote the note and had Anne run to the druggist's for a boy to take it, because he could go quicker than any of us, and she kept walking the floor and wringing her hands and asking if you was n't come, till for pity of her we had n't an answer to give her."

" Oh, it is cruel! Let me go to her!" Agnes cried, freeing herself from the doctor's hold. " Let me pass, Mary!"

The girl moved aside.

" You would best go up by yourself, Miss. But I doubt if she lets you in now. The last time Anne went she spoke very sharp, and said she wanted no one spying on her. Maybe you can get in by the Master's room, Miss. She might have forgot to lock that door."

Agnes was already up the stairs and at the door of

Isabel's room, which was at the rear of the house, too far for their voices to have reached it. There was no reply to her repeated calls, and the door did not yield; but, turning back to David's room, she passed swiftly through it to the communicating door, opened it, and hurried in.

Isabel stood in front of the mantelpiece, holding by the back of a chair and watching the hall door with a strange, wild stare. As the other door opened and she saw Agnes, her face became distorted with anger.

"*You?* What do you come for now? You are too late."

Agnes flew to her.

"Darling! Darling! I could not come sooner. It is only just over."

Her cape had become unfastened, and as she sprang forward it fell to the floor. Isabel stared in surprise at the rich evening corsage, the bare neck and arms, the white-shod feet showing incongruously beneath the short serge skirt, and some recollection struck her. She threw up her hands with an unnatural, horrible laugh.

"*The reception!* That is why you did not come! I had forgotten the reception. I thought that you were false, too,—that you had deserted me, too,—that I was alone in all the world!"

Agnes had her in her arms and was crying over her.

"Never, Isabel darling! Never while I live! O my poor Isabel, how could you think it of me, and now of all times! Don't laugh like that! Don't! Don't!'"

Isabel suddenly ceased, and dropped her flushed face on her friend's shoulder.

"You loved me all the time, then? *You* were true to me? I had *you* left still?"

"Yes, Isabel! Yes! yes!"

"David loved me, but I have tired him out. He is not coming back."

"He will come back, Isabel! He will!"

"He will *not* come back! See! See! Read!"

She broke away, and, going unsteadily to the table, groped about on it like a blind person. A letter lay there directed in David's hand. Agnes caught it up and read the address.

"'Isabel, Hidaway, Fairfields.' Is this what you are looking for?"

"Read," Isabel repeated. "Then you will understand. You will not wonder that I did it."

"That you did what, Isabel?"

"Read, read — quick, oh, quick!" Isabel commanded, and Agnes held the letter to the lamp with a shaking hand. It began without date or address. She read it aloud.

"'I recognize it—the pain in the head. It is coming on again. God help. I will go back there —know enough still. Cranston—Cranston—will return when—going fast—be patient—trust ——'"

Agnes looked up with white lips. Her heart seemed beating inside her brain.

"Cranston? What does he mean?"

Isabel's excitement had increased. She was standing over Agnes, again laughing her horrible laugh. Her eyes shone brilliantly; her cheeks and

lips were scarlet; her hair curled closely all about her shining forehead. But for her extraordinary expression she had never looked so lovely.

"There is an asylum at Cranston. That is where he said he found himself that other time," she explained, with a rapid, hissing utterance. "That was dreadful enough, if it was true. But it is worse. He has deceived me. He wants me to think that he has lost his mind again—that he has gone back there voluntarily. And it is false! Oh, let me sit down—I can't stand—I—I—" She reeled, caught at Agnes and steadied herself. "I *know*, you see. For *he is n't there!* I was cleverer than he thought. I went there to find out. He is not there! *He has never been there!*"

Agnes could not speak. Every vestige of colour had left her face. She looked at Isabel with blank wide-open eyes.

"Now do you understand, Agnes? Do you wonder that I cannot bear it—that I cannot live, knowing that he is untrue?" Her voice went up into a hoarse scream. "I loved him so! Oh, I have loved him so! But he does not love me. He went away meaning never to come back!"

"He will come back! You know he will!" Agnes cried, at last commanding her voice. "How can you be so cruel as to doubt him? Be patient. Trust him. As soon as he is well he will come to you."

Isabel sank into a chair, her head falling back against it. Her excitement subsided as if a drowning wave had passed over her. She looked up at

Agnes with pale, contracted eyes. "Where is he now, then?" she asked with difficulty. "Why was n't he at Cranston?"

"The attack may have come on too suddenly," Agnes suggested tremblingly. "He may not have had time to get there. He may have been taken somewhere else."

Isabel made a supreme effort to collect her senses; the flush had died away; her face was marble pale; her breath came slowly and noisily; she strained her eyes to keep the lids from sinking.

"But—but—if he told me the truth," she gasped, "why did they say he had never been there?"

"Oh, I do not know! I cannot guess!" Agnes cried, at her wits' end. "Only I am sure—*sure*—that what he said is true. How do you know that he was not there before? Did you see the books? Did they show you the books?"

Isabel grew weak and nerveless. She moved her hands along her lap without power to lift them.

"No—no," she stammered, moistening her dry lips. "I—I never thought. I only asked and came away."

"They were mistaken! They had forgotten!" Agnes insisted almost with violence. "He was there, Isabel! Believe him against the world!"

Her vehemence roused Isabel fully. She sat up, and an agonized look came into her face.

"If I had only thought that he might still be true—oh, I do not want to die! Agnes!" she clutched at Agnes convulsively and a great horror shook her. "It is coming! I feel it! Don't let

me die, Agnes! I do not want to die! Do not let me die!" And again she sank back inertly, with closing eyes, overwhelmed by a deathlike stupor that seized and enchained her in the very midst of her despair.

Agnes looked at her in sudden terror, then leaped to the door, and her frightened cry rang through the house.

"Dr. Kilpatrick! For God's sake, come!"

Isabel was quite asleep when the doctor reached her, but she stirred at his voice and a pitiful appeal crept into her pallid face.

"Save me! Save me!" she breathed, her heavy head falling back as she spoke.

The doctor bent over her, felt the weak pulse, noted the slow, stertorous breathing, the clammy skin, the livid lips, and lifted the unwilling eyelids from the narrowed pupils. Then he stood up and threw a searching glance round the room. A goblet was on the mantelpiece, and by its side were an empty pasteboard box and a little litter of opened powder-papers. The doctor had the box in his hand on the instant examining the label, recognized it as a prescription he had ordered during the extremity of Isabel's neuralgic attack, flung it down, and rapidly counted the papers. There were nine of them. With an ejaculation he sprang to the chair, and, lifting Isabel to her feet, shook her violently.

"Wake! Wake!" he shouted in her ear. "Speak! How long ago did you take the morphia? Speak! I command you!"

His imperative voice penetrated to Isabel's dull senses. She half opened her glazing eyes, and again a wild prayer for aid looked out from them.

"Do not let me die! I want to live!—to live!"

Beads of moisture stood on her ashen face. Her relaxed muscles refused to support her. She sank together in his grasp.

"Mary!" the doctor cried. "Agnes! Hold her up between you. Keep her walking. Pinch her—hurt her—frighten her. Keep her awake at any cost. Do not dare let her sleep. And you there," he called to the terrified maid who had followed in from the hall, "have coffee made instantly—the strongest possible. Force her to drink it. Pour it down her throat. I will run to the druggist's myself for what I need."

He was off before he had finished speaking, and Isabel, arousing, gave a despairing cry.

"He is leaving me! I shall die! Oh, is there nobody in all this world who cares enough for me to save me? David! *David!* He will come back, and I shall be dead! Oh, don't let me sleep! Can't you keep me awake? Why will you let me sleep? Keep me awake—awake!"

And the piteous voice died away in a groan, only to begin again presently under their strenuous efforts at restoration, and renew the heart-rending plaint.

"Save me! Save me! I do not want to die! I only thought so for that one moment! I want to live! I cannot bear to die! Pray to God to forgive me and let me live! He *must* let me live! I cannot die! I want to live—to live ——"

It was a terrible scene to which the doctor returned,—the small, weak creature passionately fighting against the fate she had herself induced, while the death that she had evoked crept nearer and nearer, refusing to be countermanded, and the life that she had scorned, yet so ardently desired, slipped away breath by breath in face of the utmost that love and skill could do to hold it back. Every remedy was tried, every device employed to retard the fatal slumber. But help had come too late. Slowly the drug wrought out its mission, and Sleep, like a quicksand, put up its invisible arms and drew her down into itself, stilling her prayers, paralyzing her resistance, and gradually engulfing all her turbulent soul in its fictitious calm.

Agnes only would not abandon hope. What science could not accomplish, love should. Love must save her still. Long after Isabel's last broken moan had ceased for ever, Agnes poured her heart into the deaf ears, insisting that the white lips moved in answer. Long after the lids had dropped for the last time over the eyes' agonized entreaty, Agnes still declared that the lashes quivered at her cry. Long after the pulseless hands lay limp and cold in hers, Agnes believed that she felt their responsive pressure still. Long, long after the little wayward feet had taken their last protesting step in the world where they had so persistently refused her guidance, Agnes still held the tiny form by main force upright against her own in defiance of remonstrance or command, and carried it back and forth across the room. So she kept tirelessly

on, back and forth, back and forth, until in the end, with stern insistence, Dr. Kilpatrick forced her arms apart, lifted the still, white thing away and laid it on the bed. Then he folded its hands upon its breast, and said solemnly: "Only God can wake her now."

CHAPTER XX

THE POWER OF THE NIGHT

The power of the night, the press of the storm.
— R. BROWNING.

IT was a month later, and over Isabel's grave in the cemetery on the hills the snow lay white, like the veil of kindly deceit that love threw over the secret of her last hours. Agnes had never left her side for an instant till all the sad formalities were ended and the earth had received back its own, and now she kept a jealous guard over her memory, that those who spoke of Isabel might do so only in pity and sorrow and not in blame. Besides herself no one but Dr. Kilpatrick knew that the wilful life had been brought to an end by its own act in a moment of weak despair. The servants ascribed their mistress's death to the accident of an overdose, taken in excitement by mistake, and, the doctor consenting to hold his peace, Isabel's little world was told no more than this. Even the white angel of Truth could scarcely record as a falsehood so charitable and loving a silence.

But in regard to David's mysterious disappearance this second time, wonder and surmise were not so easily turned aside, especially when, as before, every

endeavour failed to find him, although from the clue given his discovery had seemed a matter of course. Dr. Kilpatrick went immediately to Cranston, a town three hours distant by rail, only to be told, as Isabel had been, that David Mulgrave was not there and that no such name was on the books of the institution. But upon the further patient investigation of the records, which poor Isabel had not thought of making, the doctor found that during the time of David's former disappearance an unknown man, answering to his description though unidentifiable for lack of letters or papers about his person, had been found wandering in the streets of Cranston, and had been taken to the asylum. This man had recovered his senses suddenly and completely in a few days' time, and had at once obtained his dismissal, divulging his name only to the superintendent, who shortly thereafter had left the institute, and whom the doctor traced but to learn of his recent death.

Although baffled in this direction, and despite the fact that inquiries at all other similar retreats within a wide radius brought back no news of him, the family at Old Oaks, as well as the kindly hearted little doctor, felt convinced that this nameless wanderer had been David, and that a like fate had again befallen him. Godfrey, however, lacking the faith which can forego proof, confided to Clara Dean his opinion, which she immediately and unswervingly adopted in the sweetest way in the world, that men were never so easily lost unless they had purposely covered up their tracks, and that for his part he did

not expect or desire ever to see David Mulgrave again. All the same, impelled to it by something unspoken in Agnes Alden's eyes, and at no small sacrifice to himself, he made the same thorough search as before of all possible and impossible places in the city and its vicinity, only again to obtain nowhere the faintest clue.

So the cruel days had grown into a month, Agnes could not tell how, the horror of Isabel's tragic death followed by an anxiety which gradually thinned her cheeks and hollowed her eyes and gave her sweet face a look that filled Godfrey with foreboding. He was at Old Oaks one day, sitting by Mrs. Goodwin in the book-room and entertaining her with the spicy gossip that her soul loved, while every now and then he glanced toward Agnes, who, with unconcealed indifference to the talk, was standing at one of the turret windows watching a quartet of squirrels in a game of Follow-my-Leader.

It was a pretty sight. They were chasing down the hill in a line, four bits of flying grey fur a yard apart, their curving tails dusting the snow at each bound. The leader turned to an oak, sped up to the extreme end of one of the higher branches, sprang thence to the bough of another tree in a graceful flying leap whose impetus set both branches swaying and scattered the light snow in a shower, ran swiftly down, then up the trunk of a third, sprang as daringly to a fourth, and so scampered merrily on. The others followed, keeping the same space between them, making each hazardous leap as fearlessly, and as unerringly catching the tossing

bough beyond. Only the last and smallest, less experienced in dizzy, midair doings, made a perceptible pause each time. But for an instant, however. The timid are not necessarily cowards. Offering up a tiny squirrel-prayer to the god of nuts and acorns, it took its little life in its four frightened paws, leaped the perilous distance in safety, and flew rejoicingly after its fellows with a triumphant whisk of the tail.

Agnes followed their movements with eyes full of impatient longing. Oh, to be as untrammelled as all outdoor creatures were!—to be bound by no conventionalities, restricted by no traditions,—to follow no law save one's own instinct,—to be free —for one single hour only, to be free to do the thing one would!

Godfrey at last came to her, and she mutely made way for him at the window.

"Nice, is n't it—the snow and the trees and that, —so peaceful and still," Godfrey commented companionably.

Agnes compressed her lips silently. The beauty of the scene hurt her, as beauty does when hearts are sore.

Godfrey placed himself with his back to the window.

"Agnes," he began abruptly, "my father tells me that you go every day or two to Hidaway to look the house over. Is that wise?"

She looked out apathetically at the leaping squirrels.

"It is perfectly safe. I go the long way."

"But why need you go at all? It is too sad a place for you."

"Some one should go occasionally, Godfrey, now that the servants are not there. The house might be broken into. It might rain in."

"Nonsense! Fairfields is safe from burglars. And my father keeps track of things there. He has to go out constantly now that old Mrs. Wesley is so ill. Or you could send Jackson, if some one must go from Old Oaks. But it is no place for you, and you should not go," he added, with that little assumption of unwarranted authority which is so exasperating. "It revives memories that should be forgotten now."

"Now?" Agnes repeated quietly. "Memory has no dates. With memory it is always Now."

Godfrey looked at her sternly, resenting her thought rather than her words.

"There is a limit to justifiable remembrance. The time has certainly come for us to forget David Mulgrave."

She turned upon him with a suddenness that took him aback.

"You mean that he is dead?"

"I mean that if alive he is doubtless worse than dead."

"He may recover. He did before."

"He would better die this time," Godfrey returned uncompromisingly. "Fate has done for him. If ever there was a ruined life, it is his."

"It is only the weak who let Fate vanquish them," Agnes said with trembling lips, but with

the lift of the head characteristic of her when strongly moved. "He will pull his life together out of the ruins. He will rebuild it."

"My dear girl," Godfrey replied impatiently, "you know nothing about it. I look at the question from the practical standpoint of the physician, and I see what does not occur to you. The fact, for instance, that Mulgrave, with his mental history, — providing our surmises are correct, — can never remarry ——"

"*Remarry!*" Agnes flashed out, crimsoning to the brows with indignation. "Godfrey! How can you say—think—such a thing! It is but yesterday that Isabel ——"

"Professional instincts are bound to shock the sensibilities of the laity," Godfrey continued, with undisturbed equanimity. "The fact remains that his wife is dead, and in forecasting his future I see for one thing that it is impossible for him to marry again—impossible. And for the rest—well, should I ever lose my mind, I pray God I may die that day. So for Mulgrave's sake, if we chance to hear of him again ——"

"*If* we hear of him again!" Agnes interrupted, her lip quivering uncontrollably.

Godfrey's face flushed darkly. He looked at her with jealous, angry eyes.

"It is more than probable that we shall not; it is pretty nearly certain," he said coldly. The next moment he repented of his harshness. "Agnes, dear, you have been so brave all along ——"

But the limit of her endurance was reached. She

could no longer master herself; the tears would come; and, hastily turning away, she left the room. Godfrey waited long, but she did not return, and he wore Mrs. Goodwin's small stock of patience into shreds by repeating to her one after another every identical story that he had told her, twice as well, only half an hour before, and finally capped the climax by a most uncalled-for burst of confidence to the effect that he had concluded it was high time to settle down, and that he seriously contemplated marrying Clara Dean.

It was a bitterly cold night several days later. For forty-eight consecutive hours it had snowed steadily in great feathery flakes that fell with a soft, caressing touch. It was snowing still, but differently. The fine, icy particles rattled with a small, shrill sound. And the wind had risen, biting and fierce, like a malignant world-spirit let loose to spoil God's handiwork, and the serenity and peace were gone. This new accumulation of snow, massed on that which already lay thick upon the ground, made the streets for the time well-nigh impassable. Nothing on wheels could run, and only those pedestrians were abroad whom fate compelled to front the gale. The storm had it all to itself. And a glorious revel it was, whether the wind were the sport of the snow or the snow were the sport of the wind. Now it was the wind's turn, and it would seize upon the snow greedily, whirling it dizzily about in spirals like crystal dust, or blowing it horizontally down the streets in broad level bands like gauze streamers,

or shooting it back into the sky till the earth appeared to be snowing upward. And now it was the snow's turn, and the wind would falter and fall and then rush shrieking back upon its tracks, with the snow beating pell-mell after it and hammering at it with lusty white-armed strokes. And the next instant the two would intermingle and become one, so that the snow whistled and the wind was ice, and the two together were a great, whirling, delirious whiteness that owned the universe.

A glorious revel it was, indeed, but it was a bitter night to be out in, and as David Mulgrave reached the Avenue of Elms on his way home from the railway station, after three miles of plunging through drifts, he was almost spent. Every step or two he halted, breathing mightily, and turned his back to the wind; then set his teeth and faced it again. It was like a live thing, angered at his resistance and devoting its superhuman fury to his destruction. Now it opposed his passage with a giant arm barred against his breast. Now it lashed him on from behind with fine-drawn, stinging cuts. Now it drew away and cowered down in mock defeat, only to leap at him again from above, from below, from every side at once, and tear at him with cruel, freezing fingers. It pushed him, pulled him, wrestled with him, jeered at him when he fell, rushed at him when he rose, and roared discouragement and enmity at every step. But he toiled doggedly on. His train had been delayed several hours by the snow on the tracks, and it must now be nearly nine o'clock. Isabel would be frantic with anxiety.

Poor Isabel! How would she bear what he had to tell her!

He struggled on, sank up to his shoulders in a drift, floundered out of it, went a few yards more, fell into another—and another. The wind tore by, carrying off his hat into the milky distance with a shout of demoniacal derision. He was utterly exhausted. How good it would be to lie still there in the snow and rest! How soft it felt to his aching limbs! How soon he would be sheeted and blanketed out of reach of the cold for ever! And the wind would forget to look for him — and he would forget.

But Isabel was waiting, doubtless with reproaches and tears as before, but still with a sort of welcome —that is, until she knew. The thought of her nerved him to keep on, and a stretch of ground mercifully wind-swept encouraged him. He stood up and buttoned his ulster closer about his neck to shut out the flying flakes, but they blew blindingly into his unprotected face like innumerable small winged things trying to beat him back by force of numbers. Each separate particle bit where it struck him. Icicles hung from his hair, from his mustache, from his eyebrows, from his lashes. Frozen masses of snow clung to his clothes and weighed him down. He was becoming altogether a thing of ice, and his stiffened limbs moved with increasing difficulty. With a desperate effort he made the remaining distance that separated him from his own gate. It had blown open early in the storm and the drifting snow had anchored it securely back, else he could not have opened it.

Home with its warmth and cheer at last! Isabel had not bidden him good-bye when he left—how vividly he remembered every unhappy incident preceding that long blank!—but she would be glad to see him now,—at least at first, before she knew this thing that he must tell her. But just at first she would be glad, and would make haste to get him inside out of this fatal cold. He looked eagerly up at the house for the welcome of its lights. All was dark as death. He moved forward and looked again with unbelieving eyes. Not a ray shone out to meet him. Isabel could not be there. His telegram could not have reached her. The storm might easily have delayed it. But where then was she? Doubtless at the Aldens' waiting for him as before, safe in the care of those faithful, great-hearted friends. Poor Isabel! Would she ever come back to him now?

He stood leaning against the gate, and a longing came over him to go to Old Oaks. There would be light — light, and a welcome that his heart bounded to think of from one friend at least, who would not be frightened at his story. But to turn back now would be death. He could barely drag himself to the house, as it was, but the freakish wind had cleared a way through the garden, or he must have succumbed under the shivering maples before he reached the veranda steps. Up these he climbed painfully one by one, and finally gained the door. Instinctively his hand sought his key. Then he remembered that he had changed his coat the last thing before leaving home and had forgotten to

transfer any of the contents of the pockets save his purse. Fortunate that he had not forgotten that! More fortunate still that it had happened to be full.

He pulled the bell, its resonant peal reminding him how Isabel had disliked the sound. But at least it was not to be overlooked, and soon he should hear Mary's quick step across the hall within. Would she think him a ghost? Would she be afraid of him? How had Isabel accounted to the servants for his six weeks' absence?

But no Mary came. He rang again; and again; and again. The cold was benumbing him, and the wind and snow pursued him relentlessly, even under the partial shelter of the veranda roof. Why did not some one hear? He rang continuously, one peal after another, and beat on the door, shouting: "It is I! Let me in! Let me in!"

But no one came. Could all the maids have gone out, leaving the house alone? Was this their boasted fidelity? His strength was at an end. He dared not attempt the monster drifts lying defiantly between him and the servants' quarters at the back of the house. Yet he must get in, and without delay. The whole fury of the storm appeared directed at him. He tried the nearest windows. They were securely locked. The women had been faithful at least in barring their master out! Then he remembered a broken bolt in the farthest of the library windows. If by chance it had not been replaced! Thank Heaven! the sash yielded, and he stooped and entered, pushing it sharply down again in the teeth of a blast of wind and ice that poured

furiously in after him as if seeking in a last mad charge to overwhelm and slay him.

With a deep sigh he sank down in the nearest seat, drawing great, panting breaths. At first, in the relief of the sheltering walls, he was conscious of nothing but a profound sense of peace and of reprieve in not having to meet Isabel at once. But by degrees the chilliness of the atmosphere struck him. The very marrow in his bones seemed congealing. What made it so cold as this? Was it possible that the fires had been let down in such weather? He must have heat. He must get to the kitchen range.

In the faint white light shed through the windows from the snow-lit world without he could dimly see his way across the room. The matches were in their accustomed place. He struck a light and held it to the lamp, but the wick caught only to flicker and die out. Were not even the lamps filled? Was nothing in order any more? Yes, the clock was going. Its slow, steady tick was the only sound in all the house.

A pair of candelabra stood on the mantelpiece and he lighted the candles in these and looked about him. The room appeared unaltered and yet not the same. It was like the corpse of a room, with life and individuality gone out of it. Ah,—all the dainty ornaments and the silver furnishings of Isabel's desk had been removed. That was it. Isabel had not cared to leave them strewn about in her absence. Poor child! She did not know how long she might have to be away.

He took one of the candelabra, and, with a glance in at the drawing-room and dining-room, went up-stairs to Isabel's chamber, under a sudden impression that she might not have left after all, and that he must hunt for her through the house. But each room looked barer and more desolate than the other, and hers was more dismantled than any.

He went down-stairs again, and out into the back hall, and so on to the kitchen. All was dark and still here, too. The range was stone cold beneath his hand. The chairs were set back evenly against the wall. No lights? No fire? No look of life? And the door leading into the area bolted on the inside? What could it mean!

He went up the back stairs to the maids' rooms. These, too, were empty, showing not a trace of occupation, and the open closets disclosed clean bare spaces. Had the three servants left for good? With an undefined impulse he returned to Isabel's room and flung back her closet doors. But there hung all her pretty gowns, her cloaks, her jackets, her wrappers, and on the shelf above her hats lay in a picturesque and goodly row. So far as he could recall them, not one was missing. And there were her shoes — her slippers. What an insoluble mystery! How could Isabel have gone without her wardrobe?

A nameless dread laid hold of him and the cold of the place shook him as with an ague. The beating of the sleet against the windows sounded like tappings of ghostly fingers that tapped louder and louder in the silence. Then the clock struck in the

library. He could just make out the ten slow, silvery yet penetrating strokes. He started as at a friendly voice calling to him, and, closing the door upon the dread vacancy of his wife's apartment, passed on to his own room. Stranger yet! Here nothing had been removed. All was in readiness,—the bed made, fresh towels in place, his brushes and combs laid in order. A faint sense of comfort stole over him. Some one expected him. But where then was Isabel?

More and more perplexed, he wandered down the stairs again, and as he reached the hall the front door opened with a latch-key, and Dr. Kilpatrick hurried in. At sight of David he gave a cry of relief and of embarrassed pleasure.

"You! Is it *you?*"

"Yes. It is I," David said. "I am come back from the dead. Where is Isabel?"

The light he carried shone full in his face. The doctor examined him narrowly. He was mentally his fine, strong, intellectual self again—there could be no doubt of that. But besides an extreme physical exhaustion there was burned in upon his features a look before which the doctor instinctively turned away his eyes—the look of a tortured soul. The physician wisely undertook to grapple first with the bodily need so much nearer the reach of his ministrations. Without a word he went into the library, struck a match, and held it to the hearth where a fire lay ready to light, threw on an extra log or two from the well-filled wood-box, wheeled up a chair, and compelled David to sit in it.

"There," he said in the most matter-of-fact way, holding out his own hands to the blaze. "Agnes did a good thing when she laid that fire. She always insisted that you would come back."

David's look of intense inward suffering lessened.

"Is Isabel with her—with the Aldens?"

The doctor did not appear to heed. He threw another keen glance at David.

"How long is it since you tasted food?" he asked abruptly.

"I dined on the train. I want nothing in that way. Will you tell me where my wife is?"

The doctor turned back to the fire.

"I never was so surprised in my life," he said. "The house was pitch dark when I passed it an hour ago, and, seeing the lights now, I was in a great way thinking what it might be."

The nameless dread that had come upon David in Isabel's room seized hold of him with renewed force. He leaned forward. There was a certain command in his voice.

"Where is my wife? Where is Isabel?" And as instead of answering Dr. Kilpatrick threw another log upon the fire, David got up unsteadily and laid a hand on his arm. "Doctor, are you keeping her in hiding? Is she afraid to come back to me?"

The doctor kept his eyes averted.

"Poor boy!" he muttered. "Poor boy! Sit down."

"I cannot blame her, but I am all right now, or they would not have let me come, you know," David said with a forlorn smile, returning to his

seat. "Isabel told you everything, of course, when she had my letter?"

"Yes, yes. My poor boy! It is all inconceivably sad."

"That letter is the last thing I remember," David continued, feeling that the doctor was waiting to hear his story out before committing Isabel. "I could not sign it. I had forgotten my name. I thought I was on the way to Cranston—how I got there that first time I have no idea—but it seems that I brought up at Clavering."

The doctor gave a low whistle of professional curiosity.

"Clavering? There is no asylum there."

"No. I was taken to a private sanitarium. They say I called myself John Halliday. I had an uncle once of that name. But when I came to myself— That was only last night, Doctor." He broke off, and, getting up, walked to and fro in great agitation, then stopped in front of Dr. Kilpatrick. "I never knew it before," he said, looking down at him with burning eyes. "I was only eight years old when my father died. No one told me. I thought that first attack due to overwork—to worry perhaps—there had been some trouble connected with my book. I never supposed— But last night, when I came to myself and gave my right name, Dr. Blake was there. He had not seen me before. It seems he knew my father. And he told me ——"

Again David broke off and moved aimlessly about fighting down his emotion, while Dr. Kilpatrick

watched him in silent suspense. Then once more he sank into a chair and looked up at his old friend, his face twitching painfully.

" Doctor," he said desperately, " my father had periodic insanity. That is my inheritance. God have mercy on me and mine!"

He buried his face in his hands with a hoarse sob.

Dr. Kilpatrick's eyes were moist. He came and sat on the arm of David's chair and leaned over him, laying a kind arm across his shoulders. After a time David spoke again without looking up.

" How can I tell Isabel? Poor child! That is the worst of all—that she must know it."

The doctor stooped lower.

" David," he said very gently, " God has His own way of dealing out mercies. What has come to you to bear you must bear alone. You cannot tell this to Isabel. Your wife—" He paused so long that David lifted his head, and seeing the doctor's face, terribly grave and sad, he sprang to his feet in alarm.

" Doctor, what has happened? You must tell me! Where is my wife?"

The doctor, too, rose.

" David," he said solemnly, " Isabel is dead. She died two days after you went away."

David reeled.

" My God, what are you saying!" he cried out. " Isabel *dead!*"

He staggered to a chair and fell into it. The doctor came close.

" We buried Isabel over a month ago," he said,

his tones husky with feeling. "She lies at Greenhill by the side of your little son."

There was a silence in the room, broken only by the crackling of the fire and the even ticking of the clock, while outside the wind shrieked and the sleet tapped and tapped against the panes. David was white and still as death. The doctor could but guess at what was passing through his mind. Suddenly he threw out his hands.

"Thank God that I have neither wife nor child to share my fate!" he said with a breaking voice.

Then his arms dropped heavily upon the table, his head fell on them, and for a time all power of speech went from him.

It was an hour later when Dr. Kilpatrick went away. David accompanied him to the door, standing there till the plunging cutter was out of sight. Then he went back to the library and sat down, his strong frame bowed together, his head on his breast, his clenched hands hanging at his sides. Thus he remained, motionless and rigid, every outer sense suspended, while memory, that chief of life's inquisitors, held his spirit on the rack.

And meanwhile, outside, the storm slowly abated, and here and there a star shone out.

CHAPTER XXI

SEE ALL, NOR BE AFRAID!

. . . trust God : see all, nor be afraid !
— R. BROWNING.

THERE sometimes occurs in a man's experience, —and he to whom it comes is never to be envied,—an epoch of short duration so packed with concentrated emotions as seemingly to include life's whole list of endurances. To David Mulgrave ever after, the vigils of this and the preceding night seemed to have covered years of time. All the night before, after Dr. Blake's disclosure, while waiting daylight to leave the sanitarium, he had sat stricken and aghast facing the spectre of his future, a grewsome, ghostly Reality that only Death could exorcise. There it stood, merciless and undisguised, in dreadful outlines and hideous colours before which David's strong soul shuddered and grew sick. What an unimaginable fate! What a diabolical magician's play! Now to be a man of intellect and power, of high aims, steady purpose, and fine, sure promise. Then, at the stroke of a pitiless wand, to be a mindless, soulless, reasonless, uncreated thing, — human, yet not a man,— living, yet not alive,— not dead, yet more dead than the very dead! O

God, how horrible it was, at unforetold, unprophesiable seasons, without cause, without way of escape, suddenly to become this accursed thing and to be thrust out of the world of his fellows into an inconceivable chaos!

What courage could foresee such a doom and not falter? What innate blitheness—what hopefulness—could confront so awful a metamorphosis and endure? The sweat had poured from his brow as in his agony he fought against a temptation that assailed him with overwhelming force—the temptation of the open door. To make an end of this intolerable misery,—to cut the convict chain that bound him to this despicable fate,—to pass of his own volition into the silent spaces beyond and be freed once for all from worse than death,—oh! what deliverance lay in the thought! But the manhood within him had instantly taken up arms against it. Flight was for dastards. To brave men that door stood closed. Not for him could refuge lie that way.

Yet over and over the temptation had returned with undiminished intensity of appeal. By what justice was so hideous a sentence imposed upon him? Why must he submit? Why had not he, too, a right to that one last solution of a supreme crisis sanctioned by so many of earth's philosophers? Was modern prejudice superior to the wisdom of the confessedly greatest minds that had ever lived?

But again, even while dallying with the idea, something high, stern and true had risen in his own mind and answered him, and he knew that he

could not do this thing. To take one's life is to surrender to Fate. Surrender is cowardice. And cowardice is not to be yielded to by a hairbreadth, —cowardice is to be met and mastered. Whatever one's lot, therefore, where it is not to be overcome it is to be endured in silence. But to endure is to overcome. To overcome is to be strong. And to be strong is to outwit failure, and thus after all to conquer.

So he had gathered himself together at the last, and, having looked the temptation in its deceitful face and seen it to be false, had trampled it to nothing under his feet. Then he had thought of Isabel, and for her sake all that was best in him had reasserted itself. How should she weather the storm if his hand shook at the helm ? How should she breast the breakers if his stronger spirit quailed ? Not only for himself but for them both must he find courage now. And clinging desperately to the necessity of meeting the needs of this other rudderless little soul that was struggling across life's seas by his side, he had come home only to find that her frail bark had already dashed itself against the rocks and gone down.

Later, when he had recovered thought and speech, and could question Dr. Kilpatrick about Isabel's last hours, with almost the first word spoken he had divined the whole. The shock of it was infinitely greater than anything he had yet experienced. It is a frightful thing to read one's own temptation translated into another's act. To what depths of fear and weakness must she not have

descended before she finally gave way! And oh! the irony of her last swift and vain repentance! Poor frightened, unreasoning child, unwilling to live, unwilling to die, at war with her self-invoked fate to the end! Which of life's tragedies surpasses that of a perverted will allied to a clear-sighted perception of the right? A misstep in the dark is sad enough. But in the broad daylight wilfully to have left the path for the morass—that is sadder than anything on earth.

As David sat in the bare, still house, filled with loneliness as with a brooding presence, his heart went out to Isabel in a rush of tenderness and pity. He thought of her again as she had seemed in the auspicious beautiful beginning of their marriage,—loving, enthusiastic, quick in appreciation of the good, eager and fine in aspiration. Ah, if the appreciation had not proved an intellectual superficiality only, and the aspiration but an æsthetic connoisseurship of the spiritually fair and high! If the enthusiasm had not been for ideas unsustained by deeds, and if the love had not shown itself so soon the mere love of being loved, and never the love of loving!

Long after he had awakened to the fatal defects of her character, he clung obstinately to his belief in those possibilities in her that he had seen at the first, and still passionately hoped to help her to overcome the defects and to rise to her highest level. When this hope, too, was gone, and his love's last lingering breath little by little had been extinguished, then more than ever he felt

how imperative was her need of his protection, and how peremptory was the duty laid upon him of saving her from herself, if nothing more. With all the devotion and pertinacity in him he had laboured to this end, and here, too, in vain. All in a moment the poor weak little soul had slipped from his keeping, and hope and endeavour were at an end. He would have given his heart's blood to lift her, if ever so little, out of the needless purgatory that she had made of life. But of what use had his utmost effort proved? Alas! in character-making each builds by himself. No one can be forced into success. It is not upon help from others but upon his own help that each depends. The soul must have in it the principle of life, or the dead seed will not grow, though planted in the sun and screened from every storm and nursed with unremitting care. For though men lend one another of their best, it is according to his own strength or weakness that each ultimately falls or stands.

It is a truth that cannot be too often reiterated. Within and not outside of itself lies each soul's redemption. Though all should combine for it or against it, nothing can prevent it from becoming that which it has in it to become, or recreate it other than it is. Though the world may raise a man to a throne, it cannot make him kingly, nor can it abase a knightly soul by a single degrading thought, though it make of him a slave.

Slowly the night wore away, and gradually the storm subsided. The ghostly tappings against the

windows ceased, the wind sounded far away and weary, and the clock ticked louder in the stillness with amicable self-assertion, like a friend who has been overlooked and who forces recognition. The house seemed less empty for it. David drew a heavy sigh, got up and made over the fire, took a few turns across the room and sat down again. His life was to begin anew, and without Isabel. What she had fled from was even more terrible than she had known, and yet, had she been the brave, bright spirit he had thought her once, courageous, enduring, noble, they could have faced the future together and still have been happy in some measure.

He shivered as he looked down the cruel years, partitioned into a series of blanks, in which all achievement, effort, aim, memory — everything — was to be blotted out. From time to time he got up and paced the room, so lost in anguished thought that he took no note of surroundings, save now and then to throw a log upon the fire as he passed, or to glance unseeingly at the clock, until at last, worn out mind and body, he sank down with his head bent upon his clasped arms, and fell heavily asleep.

CHAPTER XXII

A GREAT WAKENING LIGHT

. . . with a great wakening light.
— LEIGH HUNT.

IN the world outside a white stillness that seemed the pulseless peace of exhaustion had followed upon the storm. The snow lay over the tired earth like a rumpled sheet tossed into disorderly folds and wrinkles during the unquiet of the night. The wind had died away and a hush deeper than sleep — a hush like the coma that precedes death — held the world in solemn suspense. Then somewhere in the immeasurable distance something stirred dimly in the dark,—something ineffably fine and holy that diffused itself by imperceptible degrees throughout space till all the atmosphere thrilled and grew sensitively alive with it. It was as if somewhere a soul had quickened. The earth breathed consciously once more, and a line of grey cut the gathered gloom along the horizon as if she had lifted a heavy eyelid and were looking wanly up. The grey line grew white, grew silver, grew flashing gold, and above it the sky trembled into pink, beneath which the earth became like a newly opened rose; and the pink throbbed itself into a

burning red, and the sun rose out of the royal heart of it like Love made manifest,—Love beneficent, glorious, supreme,—dominating all things, subjugating all things, eternally conqueror!

It was ten o'clock when David suddenly awoke and started to his feet. The candles had burned out in the sockets and the fire was a mass of ashes. But the sun was pouring in brilliantly from the adjoining room through the wide doorway, and standing on the threshold, so wrapped about in light as to appear to be bringing it in with her, was Agnes Alden, looking at him with an expression that he had never seen on any face before.

"*You!* Is it *you?*" she exclaimed, exactly as Dr. Kilpatrick had, but with a melodious tremulous note in her voice that was a revelation.

For an instant they stood spellbound, looking at each other across the room. Then whether he went to her or she came to him neither knew, but they were standing together in the midst of the sunlight, holding each other tightly by the hands and looking into each other's faces, speechless in excess of emotion. Tears brimmed over in her eyes and fell slowly upon her cheeks in shining drops, but she did not know it. All that she was conscious of in that first startled, unguarded moment was a rapture at sight of him that almost stopped her heart's beating, and an answer to it in the look that leaped into his face as he saw her.

It was a full moment before either spoke. Then Agnes drew away her hands.

"When did you come? And—oh, do you know?"

The terrible memories swept flood-like back upon him. The light in his eyes went out as if quenched. His face grew tense and strained. How could he for any smallest fraction of time have forgotten? He recoiled, as across the sunshine between them fell the black shadow of what had been.

"Yes, I know," he said unsteadily. "My poor Isabel! Dr. Kilpatrick told me all last night—*all*."

Agnes understood. She clasped her hands in involuntary appeal.

"O Mr. Mulgrave, you must know that she did not mean it! It was only a moment's awful impulse. She did not know what she was doing."

David could not answer. His features worked convulsively, and, walking off a few paces, he stood with his back to Agnes till he had regained self-control. She was frightened when he faced her again. He looked as if a cyclone of suffering had gone over him.

"No one knows what he is doing when he takes his own life," he said solemnly. "Perhaps no one should be accounted wholly responsible who does so. But it is a temptation the force of which only the tempted can understand. She must have suffered"— he suddenly threw out his arms — "God! how the poor child must have suffered before she sought relief that way! I know, because—" He paused, then went on slowly, each word a blow rung on the anvil of a deathless remembrance,—"I know, because I have been down myself to the very gates of that hell. A little more and I, too, might not have found courage to resist."

Agnes turned marble white, her quivering face expressing a pathetic entreaty to be allowed at least to share his trouble. David came nearer.

" Must I tell you ? " he asked, drawing in his breath sharply. " Or have you already guessed ? "

She looked up at him, trembling.

" Tell me."

" You know what has happened to me ? "

She trembled still more.

" You have been—not yourself."

The look that crossed his face broke her heart.

" Do you know that it is for the second time ? "

" I saw—the letter." The words were almost a whisper.

David made an effort to speak calmly, but the veins stood out on his temples and his nostrils quivered.

" It is to be for a third time," he said, clenching his hands hard, " and for a fourth time, and a fifth time, and again, and again—Heaven only knows how many times or when. It is to be over, and over, and over,— all my life long. There is no cure—no escape but death. It is an inheritance. That is my future."

He stopped short. Agnes stood looking at him with a blanched, shocked face. She tried to speak but could not frame the syllables, and, unable to bear it longer, she sank into a chair and, turning her face out of sight against the back, broke into a convulsive sobbing which shook her from head to foot.

" Agnes ! " David cried, overcome by the sight of her unrestrained distress.

With her face still hidden she put out her hand to him gropingly, and tried to check her sobs, but without success. David took it, scarcely knowing what he did.

"It is cruel — cruel!" he cried with passionate tenderness. "To pain you like this — you, who have been my one star of white light always. Oh, it is cruel! Must my fate hurt you, too?"

Strength came to Agnes with his words. Her sobs ceased, and she lifted her head and looked up at him, all her heart in her wet, true eyes.

"Nothing can ever hurt you that will not hurt me more," she said simply.

Then she rose and moved a few steps away with a lovely dignity, still looking at him with adorable frankness and sweetness. The blood rushed to his face.

"*Agnes!*" he exclaimed again, with an impetuous movement toward her.

She looked back at him, smiling falteringly, and said nothing.

David made another step forward. But the next instant he wheeled about and placed the length of the room between them.

"Forgive me — forgive me!" he cried incoherently. "I have no right—shall never have the right— And yet—this once ——"

He leaned toward her, stretching out his arms in an uncontrollable longing, and his voice shook.

"How can I tell you what you are to me! Little by little you have come nearer and nearer, ministering always to my highest desires, fostering my best

aims, spurring me on and up, giving me hope, sympathy, help, inspiration, whenever my need was greatest. To leave you will be tearing myself body from soul. Oh, forgive me! What am I saying! From to-day I will put myself out of your life for ever!"

Agnes looked at him across the room. Her smile was like living sunlight.

"David," she said, and his name, so spoken, sounded like a benediction, "what I have grown to be to you, you have been to me always, from the first day I saw you. It is Heaven's decree. How can you put yourself out of my life?"

She came down the room toward him, slowly, scarcely conscious that she moved. Warmth, light, and peace seemed to tremble in the atmosphere about her and to come with her as she came, and before the expression of her face all the trouble suddenly went out of him and left him calm.

"How are our lives divided?" she asked with exquisite serenity. "To live apart is not separation. Is there not a highest sense of all in which no fate can separate us? My spirit is yours, and whatever else there may have been of me—whatever is not spirit — has ceased to be, and will belong to no one while I live."

David took her hand reverently.

"Dear," he said, infinitely moved, "do you think I could accept such a sacrifice—the sacrifice of your beautiful young life with all its rights to happiness—to completeness ——"

Agnes laughed a laugh like low music that stirred

strange depths in him, making joy seem a possible thing once more.

"Sacrifice?" she repeated. "It is my coronation. Whatever I have been to you in the past I will be to you still more in the future. Whenever you need any comfort or sympathy or help that I can give, you will come to me, and I will not fail you. I will live for that — that I may have more and more to give you, as you give more and more to the world. And when those dark times come— O David, it will be only a little longer night than usual dividing our happy hours. I shall always be waiting for you when you come back, as I have been waiting now."

David's deep eyes glowed. For a time he could not speak.

"It is the consecration of all my life," he said at last in vibrating tones. "In bearing my cross with me you are lifting me above myself. I have a future still! Life, even with its crucifixions, is a glory! You are laying a solemn debt upon me, Agnes. I owe you the utmost of every power that is in me. I will not disappoint you."

As he spoke there was the sound of steps on the veranda. Some one tried the front door impatiently, and, finding it unlocked, came quickly into the hall and so into the room where they were. It was Dr. Kilpatrick. He glanced keenly from one to the other with a perturbed, anxious look.

"I am sorry I could not get to Old Oaks sooner," he said to Agnes. "I hurried there at the first

chance this morning to tell you—to let you know—But you had already gone."

Agnes went to him and laid a loving hand on his arm.

"How kind of you, dear Dr. Kilpatrick! But I found Mr. Mulgrave here, and he has told me all that there is to tell. We have had a long talk. I am glad that you have come and that I need not leave him alone, for I must go home now. John will be tired waiting."

Turning to David with the same radiant quiet, she gave him her hand, and her eyes rested on his a moment, soft and sweet and full of a delicious peace.

"You will come to Old Oaks soon, will you not?" she said. "Good-bye till then."

THE END

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